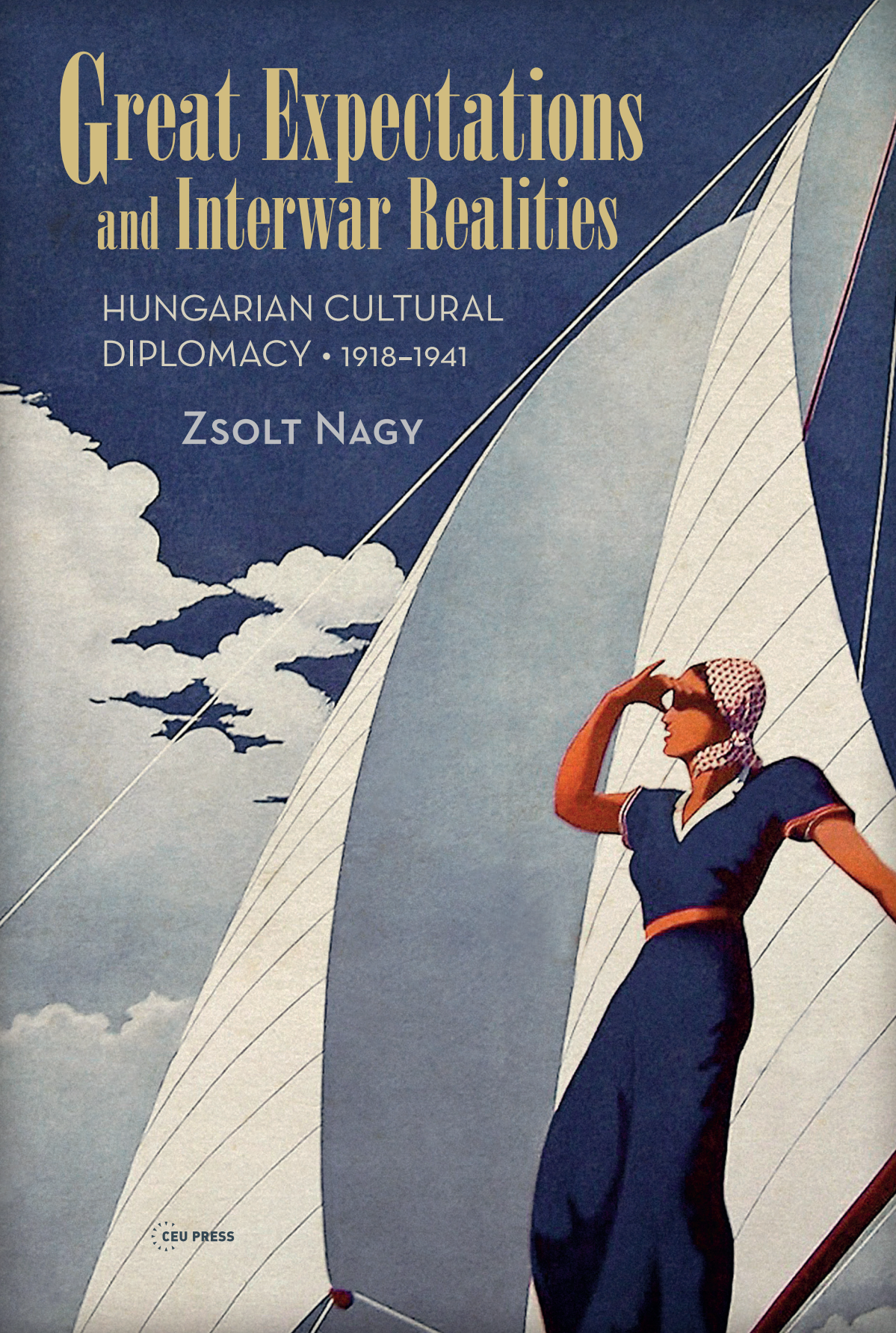


Great Expectations and Interwar Realities

HUNGARIAN CULTURAL
DIPLOMACY • 1918–1941

ZSOLT NAGY

 CEU PRESS



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GREAT EXPECTATIONS
AND INTERWAR REALITIES

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HUNGARIAN
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY,
1918–1941

ZSOLT NAGY



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To my wife Karla

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BNV:	Budapesti Nemzetközi Vásár (Budapest International Trade Fair)
ELTE Kt:	ELTE Egyetemi Könyvtár Kézirattár (Manuscript Collection of the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University)
HQ:	<i>Hungarian Quarterly</i>
HRL:	Hungarian Reference Library in New York
IBUSZ:	Idegenforgalmi Beszerzési Utazási és Szállítási Rt. (Tourism, Procurement, Travel, and Transport Company)
Kirbib:	Királyi Balatoni Intéző Bizottság (Royal Balaton Management Committee)
KÜM:	Külügyminisztérium (Hungarian Foreign Ministry)
LUCE:	L' Unione Cinematografica Educativa
MÁV:	Magyar Királyi Államvasutak (Royal Hungarian State Railways)
MFI:	Magyar Filmiroda (Hungarian Film Bureau)

MKT:	Magyar Külügyi Társaság (Hungarian Society for Foreign Affairs)
MNFA:	Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum (Hungarian National Film Archives)
MOL:	Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives)
MRA:	Magyar Rádió Archívuma (Hungarian Radio Archives)
MRL:	Magyar Revíziós Liga (Hungarian Revisionist League)
MSZT:	Magyar Szemle Társaság (Society of the Hungarian Review)
MTHR:	Magyar Telefon Hirmondó és Rádió Rt. (Hungarian Telephone News Service and Radio)
NRH:	<i>Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie</i>
MV:	<i>Magyar Világhíradó</i> (Hungarian World News)
MTI:	Magyar Távirati Iroda (Hungarian Telegraph Bureau)
OMIH:	Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatal (Hungarian National Tourism Bureau)
OSzKKt:	Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár (Hungarian National Széchényi Library manuscript division)
TESZK:	Társadalmi Egyesületek Szervezetének Központja (Central Organization of Social Groups)
TEVÉL:	Területvédő Liga (League for the Protection of [Hungarian] Territory)
UFA:	Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft
VKM:	Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium (Ministry of Religion and Public Education)

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If someone had told me twenty-some years ago, when I arrived in the United States, that I would author a book that tells the story of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy—and that I would write it in English—I might have had some misgivings about that person’s mental faculties. Yet here I am, writing to acknowledge and sincerely thank those without whom this book would have remained but a fantasy. Just as my journey was long, so is the list of people and institutions I owe thanks to.

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liant neighbor in Keszthely, where I grew up. She and her family lost almost everything after World War II. What did remain was her incredible collection of books, stretching from floor to ceiling, wall to wall in her 300-square-foot apartment. She guided me through her collection with care and patience while introducing me to some of the greatest literature ever written. She also died far too early. I can only hope that somewhere and somehow, they both see me and are proud of me. Last, but certainly not least, for she is the most important person in my life, is my wife Karla. There is simply not enough space here to thank her for everything she has done and continues to do for me. There is not enough space to apologize for vacations never taken, for all the evenings I missed, for my mood swings (which were plenty), for never learning how to pay a bill, and for all else that I could have done but did not, citing my need to read, research, and write. The beauty of her is that she never made me feel that I should apologize for anything. She followed me from place to place, sacrificed, and supported me every step of the way. She has done it all and continues to do so with a smile on her face and love in her eyes. For that and more, I dedicate this book to her.

Introduction

“If there is an international institute of propaganda, it ought to present a diploma to the Hungarian entrusted with the task of placing Hungary’s grievances before the world,” wrote historian Bernard Newman in 1939.¹ Of course, there was no such institution. Even if there were, it is questionable whether Hungarians would have wanted such a diploma, for in the post-World War I period, the word “propaganda” gained a rather negative connotation.² Instead, the Hungarian government opted for a less direct form of persuasion—a campaign of cultural diplomacy. Hungarian cultural diplomacy went beyond protesting; it actively sought to alter the country’s position on the international scene. In other words, it was a public relations campaign *avant la lettre*, deploying a variety of cultural resources aimed at constructing a positive image abroad and shaping international public opinion in Hun-

¹ Bernard Newman, *Danger Spots of Europe* (London: The Right Book Club, 1939), 286.

² As Nicoletta F. Gullace stated in her recent article, “most scholars of propaganda look at the 1920s as the moment the term ‘propaganda’ lost its neutral tone and came to be regarded as something malign and subversive.” Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Allied Propaganda and World War I: Interwar Legacies, Media Studies, and the Politics of War Guilt,” *History Compass* 9, no. 9 (2011): 689. See also, as Gullace suggests, Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1–16.

gary's favor. The primary task of this cultural diplomacy was to create a positive image of a modern, progressive country, the best representative of European culture and Western civilization in East and Central Europe, and promulgating it on the international stage. In the absence of military, economic, and political power, this endeavor became an essential component of Hungary's foreign policy, for it had plenty of grievances to air before the world.

Great Expectations and Interwar Realities is an examination of the practice variously referred to as "cultural diplomacy," "self-advertisement," "image cultivation," "image projection," "public relations," "soft power," "nation-branding," "perception management," "national reputation management," and, most recently, "public diplomacy."³ By investigating the intersection of diplomacy, national identity construction, and cultural production, my study evaluates the promises and limitations of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy. It asks two questions: What was the value of such practices when employed by a state that lacked material and non-material power? In which ways did the country's cultural-diplomatic endeavors contribute to its postwar nation-building project? In posing these questions, *Great Expectations and Interwar Realities*, while rooted in Hungary, examines larger themes such as the nature of interwar international relations and the complexities of national identity construction. Hungarian cultural diplomacy had a great impact, if for different reasons than historians have often thought. For while cultural diplomacy helps us to understand the ways in which small states exploited the gaps in the international system, its most enduring achievements are connected with domestic development.

³ I have chosen the term "cultural diplomacy," for Hungarians themselves referred to it as such during the interwar years. The term (*kultúrdiplomácia*) was coined by János Hankiss in his 1934 article "A kultúrdiplomácia alapvetése," *Külügyi Szemle* (1934, no. 2): 158–64. He defined it further—albeit reluctantly, for he argued that simple definition does not do justice to the complexity of the undertaking—in his 1937 follow-up publication as an action that "brings about foreign policy goals with the use of cultural instruments." See János Hankiss, *A kultúrdiplomácia alapvetése* (Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Társaság, 1937), 1. For a useful discussion on definitions and more, see Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

Conducting a cultural-diplomatic campaign was one of the few viable alternatives that the Hungarian leadership had to alter the country's place in the postwar international order. In November 1918, Austria-Hungary capitulated, signaling the end not only of World War I but also of the Dual Monarchy. During the war 661,000 Hungarian soldiers were killed, 740,000 were captured (thousands of whom vanished in Siberia), and some 250,000 disabled personnel arrived home from the front. As a consequence of malnourishment and inadequate health care, the civilian death toll reached 600,000.⁴ In addition to the physical devastation, the war left its destructive imprint on the country's moral fabric. News about corruption, crime, prostitution, and the subsequent increase in sexually transmitted diseases became a part of everyday life. Within two years, Hungary experienced tremendous upheaval: a failed democratic bourgeois revolution; the rise of a Bolshevik-style Soviet Republic, its Red Terror, and its ultimate collapse; foreign occupation; counter-revolution; quasi-civil war; White Terror; and a draconian peace treaty. On June 4, 1920, Hungarian delegates signed the Treaty of Trianon, drafted by France, Great Britain, and the United States. With the stroke of a pen, Hungary lost 71.5 percent of its prewar territory and 63.6 percent of its population. In addition, Hungary also lost 62.2 percent of its railways, 73.8 percent of its roads, and 64.6 percent of its navigable waterways. Fiume, Hungary's only seaport, was also taken away. The treaty reduced most of the country's timber, coal, and iron resources. In addition, approximately three

⁴ There is no certainty about the number of Hungarian victims. Ferenc Julier stated in 1933 that of the 3.8 million men mobilized, 661,000 died, 743,000 were wounded, and 734,000 were taken prisoner. See Ferenc Julier, *1914–1918: A világháború magyar szemmel* (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1933), <http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/bibl/mil/ww1/julier/8.html> (accessed June 11, 2016). Mária Ormos provides different numbers. According to her data, 3.4 million Hungarian men were mobilized, 531,000 died, 500,000 were injured, and over 833,000 were taken prisoner. See Mária Ormos, *Hungary in the Age of the Two World Wars, 1914–1945* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press), 20. The discrepancy might have something to do with the number of prisoners and their fate. According to Holger H. Herwig, from the entire Austro-Hungarian Army, 1,691,000 men were taken prisoner, and 480,000 died in captivity. See Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914–1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 439.

million ethnic Hungarians in the detached territories became minorities in neighboring countries. Hungarians reacted with disbelief and resentment. The “Trianon Syndrome,” as some historians have termed it, transformed the national mentality. Revisionism—revising the Trianon Treaty—became Hungary’s civic religion. The majority of the population, including Hungarian leaders, agreed that recovering the lost territories needed to be the primary aim of foreign policy.⁵

Before we proceed, a few words are necessary about the relationship between revisionism, power, and international relations. The oft-quoted maxim of Thucydides offers a very straight-forward equation: “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”⁶ Hungarian leadership was not prepared to consent to Thucydides’s axiom and was unwilling to accept the country’s marginalized status.

⁵ There is a great deal of literature on the subject of Hungarian revisionism. The best single-volume study on the topic, in my opinion, is Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* (Budapest: Osiris Zsebkönyvtár, 2001). A revised and expanded edition was published under the same title in 2009: see Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* (Pozsony [Bratislava]: Kalligram, 2009). Zeidler’s English-language study also offers a fine guide to this issue: see Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary 1920–1945*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen DeKornfeld (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press). See also Ignác Romsics, ed., *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás, 1920–1953* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998); and Béla Király, Peter Pastor, and Ivan Sanders, eds., *Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking; A Case Study of Trianon* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982). Another concept that is often used in discussions of interwar Hungarian politics is irredentism. In my usage of revisionism vis-à-vis irredentism, I adhere to Zeidler’s distinction, in which revisionism signals Hungarian aims to *legally* revise the postwar treaty. This was the official stance of the Hungarian government after 1927. The government actually spoke out against irredentist propaganda (officially, that is), which they viewed as inflammatory and something that jeopardized the government’s pursuit of the treaty’s peaceful revision. However, one must note that contemporaries did not necessarily make this distinction and that irredentist claims and rhetoric were often used even in some government publications. For more, see Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* (2001), 51–52.

⁶ Quoted in John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 163; and somewhat differently in Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 16. For the original quote, see Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 5.89.

They aimed to reverse the treaty, recover the country's lost territory, recapture its former status and glory, reclaim its markets and resources, expand its ideology of Hungarian regional supremacy, and alter Hungary's overall international position.⁷ However, carrying out these sorts of changes requires considerable power. What, then, makes a state strong? What is power? To Joseph Nye, "power is like weather" in that "everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it."⁸ Power "is also like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that."⁹ If one looks up the dictionary definition (as Nye did), one learns that power is "the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events."¹⁰ According to John J. Mearsheimer, power is military might.¹¹ For others, power includes "wealth, population, territory, raw materials, and technology."¹² Post-World War I Hungary had none of these. Yet even the doyens of the realist school of international relations—Edward Hallett Carr and Hans J. Morgenthau—agreed that in the post-World War I world, in addition to the aforementioned "hard powers," there was an additional source of power: "the power over opinion."¹³

The recognition that public opinion matters is one of the least-examined legacies of the Great War. Hungarians recognized the importance of international public opinion. "International public opinion is a remarkable thing. It is like atmospheric pressure one cannot see, yet under its weight one has anxious feelings," wrote Kuno Klebelsberg, Hungarian minister of religion and public education (or minister of

⁷ For more on revisionism as a concept, see Jason W. Davidson in *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2014); "power, n," def. 2, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/power (accessed March 19, 2014).

¹¹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 5.

¹² Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States*, 28.

¹³ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1941), 168–75; and Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973), 148–49, 257–60, and 332–39.

culture, as it was also called) in 1927.¹⁴ He might not have been able to define it exactly, but Klebelsberg and postwar Hungarian leadership realized that successful foreign policy, especially in the absence of “hard power,” required generating positive international public opinion. He argued that the negative image of the country was responsible for the treaty’s severity and the country’s isolation. The Hungarian political elite, Klebelsberg and his colleagues, Prime Ministers Pál Teleki and István Bethlen, and members of the Foreign Ministry (KÜM) believed cultural diplomacy was one of the most viable means of regaining the lost territories and gaining international recognition. Hungary’s political situation could only improve if the great nations’ judgment of the country improved. Yet, continued Klebelsberg, it could not be done through simple propaganda, since the idea of organized propaganda in itself breeds mistrust and suspicion.¹⁵ The answer was a cultural-diplomatic campaign, which emerged as a crucial instrument in the country’s postwar recovery.

Hungarian leadership was not alone in recognizing the links between international public opinion, cultural production, and power. Other East-Central European states also competed for the attention and backing of the international community. The reason for the competition was the Versailles system. The end of World War I and the peace treaties that followed significantly altered both the physical and mental map of East and Central Europe. The great empires of the Romanovs, Hohenzollerns, Habsburgs, and Ottomans gave way to a collection of new, or considerably altered, nation-states. The Treaties of Paris and the creation of the League of Nations carried the promise of ending Great Power hegemony in international relations and supposed the empowerment of small states. For a few years the new system seemed to work, despite what Mark Mazower calls its “liberal paternalistic nature.” However, by the mid-1920s, Mazower argues, “as the balance of power in Europe shifted, the League became increasingly marginalized,” and

¹⁴ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1928), 97. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In the semi-official discourse, the Ministry of Religion and Public Education (*Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium*, VKM) was often referred to in shorthand as the Ministry of Culture (*Kultuszminisztérium*).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

“diplomacy flowed around Geneva rather than through it.”¹⁶ In many ways, it was the return of Great Power politics. Once again, the Western powers had the sole right to mediate and settle border disputes and adjustment plans, call for plebiscites, and oversee the compliance of the various states with the treaties in respect to their minorities.¹⁷ The East-Central European nations found themselves in a dependent relationship. Hungarian, Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav leaders vied for the West’s acceptance and support in order to secure their country’s place within the European community and to establish sovereign rights over their real and perceived national territories. In this new geopolitical climate, the small nation-states of Eastern and East-Central Europe, bound by their treaty obligations, faced a new reality: the game might be played in the East, but the referee and the rules came from the West. They understood cultural diplomacy as a zero-sum game. As Lord Newton, who was friendly to the Hungarian case, wrote in 1934:

This is the era of Propaganda, and all the smaller European nations, and some of the greater, are engaged ceaselessly in putting their cases before the world. Those who were on the winning side are vociferating that nothing would induce them to relinquish the spoils which they had obtained either by merit or by luck, and those who were defeated are equally persistent in demanding that their grievances should be remedied, that minorities should be protected, and the flagrant injustices in connection with the wholesale transfer of nationals from one State to another should be rectified.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 64–65.

¹⁷ These rights nominally belonged to the League of Nations, but in reality they were under the purview of the Great Powers. On interwar minority rights, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially chaps. 7 and 10.

¹⁸ Lord Newton’s preface to Count Stephen Bethlen (István Bethlen), *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace: Four Lectures Delivered in London in November 1933* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), v. (Reprint, Arno Press Inc., 1971.)

Not surprisingly, for the regions' leaders, from Hungary's István Bethlen to Czechoslovakia's Edvard Beneš, diplomacy was, to appropriate Carl von Clausewitz's maxim, a continuation of war by other means. It was certainly perceived as a competition, but it was a different kind of conflict. Kuno Klebelsberg announced the basic guideline of the campaign in his 1922 inaugural speech: "It is not the sword but culture that can sustain and make the Hungarian homeland great once again."¹⁹ Accordingly, on this battlefield, artists, architects, and filmmakers became warriors, just as their paintings, buildings, movies, and other cultural products became weaponry. This study is thus about the origins, organization, and practice of those efforts.

To Hungarians the "soft power" of cultural diplomacy indeed seemed to be a viable option. In his *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye argues that there are three sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies.²⁰ Michael David-Fox's recent study of 1920s and 1930s Soviet cultural diplomacy illuminated the importance of political values—in the form of courting Western public opinion by showcasing the great socialist experiment to intellectuals and beyond.²¹ The Hungarian political system was, and was seen as, anachronistic and did not have a clear and universally recognizable message. Foreign policy as soft power requires legitimacy and some level of moral authority. Legitimacy and authority were goals that Hungarian cultural diplomacy could only hope to achieve. Culture, however, was available. The "ministry of culture shall simultaneously carry out the duties of the ministry of national defense," proclaimed Klebelsberg.²² The Hungarian political elite, in concert with the country's intellectual and industrial elite, spared no effort in reshaping the country's image abroad. Yet as Nye puts it, the soft power of cultural

¹⁹ Quoted in Kuno Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek harmincas évek!* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1930), 111.

²⁰ Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

²¹ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²² Kuno Klebelsberg, *Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno beszédei, cikkei és törvényjavaslatai, 1916–1926* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927), 516. The statement was originally made on February 20, 1925, during discussion about the budget of the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Religion and Public Education).

diplomacy requires an audience who is willing to receive the message. The success of soft power depends on the “currency of attraction.” Creating an attractive image requires careful framing of the message and its objectives and must avoid a “narrow and myopic perspective.”²³

To be sure, Hungary’s message and its very objectives were rather “narrow and myopic.” The stated ambition was to change the status quo and revise Trianon, as well as to gain the respect of other nations—both things to which Hungarians felt entitled. The central theme of Hungarian cultural diplomacy was based on a conviction that the solidification and promotion of the country’s alleged cultural superiority (*kultúrfölény*) and Western roots would facilitate the rise of Hungary. Architects of the cultural-diplomatic campaign argued that the challenge was to maintain and expand Hungary’s role as *primus inter pares*, that is, to be “first among equals” in the field of cultural achievement in East-Central Europe, and to portray Hungarian regional superiority to the world. To spread this message, government and government-related agencies undertook a series of important initiatives: establishing new cultural institutions abroad, creating foreign-language journals, reinventing the country’s tourism industry, and producing modern cinema and radio broadcasts to carry the content of cultural diplomacy to foreign audiences. These efforts achieved some success, for the cultural institutions attracted visitors, the number of foreign tourists skyrocketed, and the products of the new media—short culture films and radio programs—appealed to audiences worldwide.

In spite of Hungarian efforts, pleased onlookers, joyful tourists, and delighted cinemagoers and radio listeners could not change the fact that the Great Powers had little interest in the region and even less in supporting Hungarian revisionist goals. At least, that was the case until another revisionist country—one with actual military, economic, and political power—entered the scene: Nazi Germany. While Hungarians continued their worldwide campaign of cultural diplomacy, traditional diplomacy moved closer to Berlin, for it was Hitler’s Germany, not the international community, that offered the real possibility of territorial revision. By 1941 Hungary partially achieved its revisionist goal, but not because its cultural diplomacy convinced international

²³ Nye, *Soft Power*, 16, 60–61, and 99.

public opinion of the necessity of such revision. Rather, it was a result of a Faustian bargain for which Hungary and many of its citizens would pay a heavy price. In this sense, Hungarian cultural diplomacy was unsuccessful.

Great Expectations and Interwar Realities offers another way to look at cultural diplomacy, by moving beyond immediate goals and instead focusing on its long-term consequences in connection with the country's state- and nation-building efforts. It is easy to forget that World War I not only ended the empires but also produced a number of new or newly reconstructed entities in dire need of international recognition. Joseph Rothschild's 1974 *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* cautioned against passing over the obvious yet continuously underrated achievement of the period. Newly constructed or reconstructed nations carved out a level of legitimacy on the international stage that, as Rothschild argued, neither Nazi Germany nor the Soviet Union was able to undermine.²⁴ National identity construction and its imagery and infrastructure played a significant role in this development. Because its very goal was to gain support for foreign policy as well as much-needed recognition as a member of the community of nations, cultural diplomacy was a crucial component of fashioning that identity. In other words, by examining the practices of cultural diplomacy, we can see that Hungarian national identity was much more than an internal construct, for it was influenced greatly by the actual and fictional standards of the West. Paul Hanebrink's outstanding study of Hungary's Christian nationalism—*In Defense of Christian Hungary*—was an important step toward understanding the complexities of interwar Hungarian identity construction.²⁵ My book builds on this and asks questions about the relationship between Hungarianness and Europeaness. What kind of Hungary did Hungarians seek to present to the world: modern or traditional? How Hungary did position itself in relation to Western civilization (as they understood it)? Why did they replace the pagan chieftain Árpád with St. Stephen at the forefront of

²⁴ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 24.

²⁵ Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

the pantheon of Hungarian history? What was Hungarian about Hungarian music? What tourist attractions best represented Hungary and Hungarian culture: the serene and traditional countryside, or cosmopolitan and modern Budapest? Or something in between? By examining the ways these and similar questions were debated and negotiated, this book offers a different understanding of identity construction in which external factors—beyond rivalry and “othering”—carried a great deal of weight.

Hungarians, of course, were neither the first nor the last to employ their cultural capital—real and imagined—to reformulate their image abroad in order to gain the necessary support for foreign policy goals. Richard T. Arndt recently remarked that if war was the “last resort of kings,” as Hugo Grotius contended, then cultural diplomacy was surely the first.²⁶ Cultural diplomacy has been practiced since the Bronze Age. Scholars such as historian Jan Melissen argue that image cultivation was practiced in biblical times and continued through Byzantine times and the Italian Renaissance.²⁷ The Venetians had already introduced the regular distribution of newsletters, but it was the invention of the printing press that truly revolutionized the role of public opinion in international relations. One of the “true pioneers” who realized the potential of “identity creation and image projection” was Cardinal Richelieu in early seventeenth-century France.²⁸ In 1635 he established the Académie Française to cultivate French language and culture to broaden the influence of the kingdom. His successor, Cardinal Mazarin, continued the work of his tutor and in turn established the Collège des Quatre-Nations in 1643. Patriots and other individuals also utilized their artistic talents to conduct their own cultural propaganda campaign. Lord Byron at the beginning of the nineteenth century invoked and propagated the dream that “Greece might still be free.” Novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz and pianist Ignacy Paderewski did a great deal to promote the idea of an independent and free Poland. Yet it

²⁶ Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005), xi.

²⁷ Jan Melissen, “The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice,” in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

was only at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, wrote Philip M. Taylor, that “attempts to inform, cultivate, control and manipulate public opinion have resulted in the scientific development of the new arts of publicity, public relations, advertising and propaganda conducted through organizations designed specifically to influence the audience to respond in a manner desired by those in power or by those who wish to be in power.”²⁹ France’s Alliance Française (1883) was the forerunner of this development. The institution’s goal was to promote French language and culture worldwide. Among its founders were Jules Verne, Ferdinand de Lesseps, and Jules Renan.

The real turning point in the history of cultural diplomacy was World War I. As Harold D. Lasswell put it in his 1927 *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, “the history of the late War shows that modern war must be fought on three fronts: the military front, the economic front, and the propaganda front.”³⁰ In the aftermath of the Great War, intellectuals and politicians alike awoke to the power of propaganda. A new emphasis on cultivating public opinion resulted in an explosion of studies. The United States led the way in the new field of public relations. Universities offered courses on the subject, and public relations firms were established. Intellectuals such as philosopher John Dewey expressed deep concern about the effects of propaganda on public consciousness, not to mention its impact on political practices. Opposed to the Deweyan liberal optimists were the realists, who propagated a scientific understanding of the concept and promoted a new brand of public relations expertise. Their camp included the likes of Edward Bernays, Ivy Ledbetter Lee, Harold Lasswell, and Walter Lippmann.³¹ Lippmann pointed out that we, as people, know our environment only indirectly and that newspapers, books, and other materials indirectly influence our understanding and belief system.³² In

²⁹ Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

³⁰ Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 214.

³¹ Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15.

³² Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 4–5.

his 1923 book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Edward Bernays argued that “perhaps the most significant social, political and industrial fact about the present century is the increased attention which is paid to public opinion.”³³ Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, used a combination of his uncle’s psychoanalysis and the work of French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon on crowd psychology to explain the concept of public relations. In his view, “no idea or opinion [was] an isolated factor.”³⁴ Harold D. Lasswell argued similarly but went even further, pointing out that governments often constructed ideas and opinions through propaganda. He maintained that even after the war’s conclusion, “all governments are engaged to some extent in propaganda as part of their ordinary peace-time functions,” because “they make propaganda on behalf of diplomatic friends or against diplomatic antagonists, and this is unavoidable.”³⁵

Nations small and large came to appreciate the benefits of positive foreign public opinion. Democratic and authoritarian governments from London to Tokyo deployed their cultural capital under the aegis of “cultural diplomacy.” Various government and government-related institutions opened their doors with the goal of promoting their respective nations’ cultural, scientific, and historical achievements. To fulfill their task, they utilized the scientific and technological advances of the time, projecting their messages through moving pictures and radio waves. In 1923 the French government openly acknowledged the need for “intellectual expansion.” The “cultural relation section” of the French Foreign Ministry opened cultural institutions within and outside embassies worldwide. In these institutions one found the crème of France’s young intellectuals, many of whom became household names in academic circles: Claude-Lévi Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes.³⁶ Through the interwar years the French example was followed by German institutions, the Italian Dante Alighieri Society, the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad, the Japanese Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, the British Council, and

³³ Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1923), 34.

³⁴ Ibid., 97.

³⁵ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 14.

³⁶ Arndt, *The First Resort*, 37.

others.³⁷ These various activities multiplied during the Cold War. In short, cultural diplomacy became a major attribute of twentieth-century foreign relations.

Scholars of cultural diplomacy have done an excellent job illustrating the role of cultural diplomacy in international relations. However, for the most part they have disregarded both East-Central Europe and the interwar period, preferring to focus on post-World War II American-Soviet cultural diplomacy.³⁸ This is slowly changing, and recent studies are challenging the hitherto hegemonic periodization and geographical focus of the pertinent literature. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht was among the first to call for the decentralization of the topic.³⁹ Andrea Orzoff, in her excellent study of interwar Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy, demonstrated that the principal practitioners of cultural diplomacy included the small countries of East-Central Europe.⁴⁰ Being small does not necessarily mean being inconsequential, as we

³⁷ For more on this, see Ruth Emily McMurry and Muna Lee, *The Cultural Approach: Another Way in International Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1947); Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Philip M. Taylor, “Cultural Diplomacy and the British Council: 1934–1939,” *British Journal of International Studies* 4, no. 3 (October 1978): 244–65; and Sang Mi Park, “Japan as a Cultural State (bunka kokka Nippon): Theater, Culture, and Politics” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007).

³⁸ For example, see Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); and Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

³⁹ Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, ed., *Decentering America* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds., *Culture and International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

⁴⁰ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

have learned from Holly Case's recent work, which investigates the question of Europeanness in connection with Hungarian and Romanian efforts to gain control and legitimacy over the disputed territory of Transylvania during World War II.⁴¹ *Great Expectations and Interwar Realities* aims to contribute to this ongoing re-examination of small-state cultural diplomacy.⁴²

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter contextualizes the construction of interwar cultural diplomacy in Hungary and elsewhere. It starts with the war years (1914–1918) to illustrate the growing importance of propaganda. It asks the following questions: How did the Hungarian leadership conclude that the “resurrection” of the country depended on its image abroad? What steps did it take to organize the country's cultural production to compete with the similar efforts of the neighboring states? Finally, the chapter provides an overview of traditional diplomacy, providing a framework for what comes later.

Chapter 2 illustrates the complexity of postwar image (re-)construction. By investigating the ways Hungarians viewed themselves and the rest of Europe, my study depicts the anxieties, fears, and hopes that surrounded Hungary's effort to renew and revise its tarnished image abroad. It also argues that competing visions of Hungarianness played an important role in the construction of national identity. Finally, the chapter speaks to the larger questions of Europeanness, for the Hungarian elite was determined to build a national identity that would enable the country to join the European community of nations.

The three subsequent chapters present detailed studies of the Hungarian campaign of cultural diplomacy in practice by examining three separate, yet related, topics: academia and scholarship, tourism, and

⁴¹ Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

⁴² Anikó Kovács-Bertrand's fine monograph examines Hungarian revisionist propaganda practices. However, I think her periodization of the topic forecloses a large and productive segment of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, which in my estimation continued until at least 1941 (and as Case showed in her *Between States*, even beyond). See Anikó Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Der publizistische Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon, 1918–1931* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997).

radio and film production. Other topics could have been included in the discussion, such as sports, fairs, and festivals, and industrial/agricultural products and their marketing. However, I have decided to limit my examination to the above three subjects, for two reasons. First, there is the basic problem of sources. Unfortunately, during World War II and the 1956 Revolution, much of the relevant documentation that was housed at the Hungarian National Archives was destroyed. My second consideration concerns target audiences. Academic representation targeted a small, educated, and, for the most part, privileged elite group of intellectuals, such as university professors and their students. Tourism targeted those who could afford to travel. In the 1920s and 1930s, despite advances in mass transportation, traveling abroad for leisure for the most part remained the privilege of the well-off. However, radio and cinema offered ways for Hungarians to bring the country to the lower classes, as these media were the most “democratic” instruments of cultural diplomacy. Consequently, my selection provides an across-the-board analysis of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. These chapters do not pretend to offer an all-encompassing examination of interwar Hungarian academia, tourism, and cinema and radio history. Rather, they focus on their connections to cultural diplomacy, because an in-depth analysis of these three “construction sites” indicates that cultural diplomacy, depending on its target, at times complemented traditional diplomacy, while at other times it probed possible avenues that traditional diplomacy could not. Moreover, it shows that the construction of national identity, especially when done for foreign consumption, is a complicated process accompanied by uncertainty, manipulation, and conflict. Governmental and non-governmental organizations joined forces to fashion a European identity for Hungary, yet they were uncertain about what was to be considered European. In their search for positive illumination of the Hungarian character, they manipulated, and at times invented, cultural traditions and created and managed new outlets for cultural production. Conflicts between traditionalists and modernizers, and between ideologues and businesspeople, further complicated this process. So too did the growing influence of the Hungarian radical right, with its virulent anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Examining the motivations and rationale behind the selection process allows us to gain a better understanding of the practice of interwar cultural diplomacy, with its external goals and internal challenges.

The final chapter investigates the ever-elusive issue of reception and both the short- and long-term legacies of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Being a “small country” with the added burden of being a “defeated small country” significantly reduced Hungary’s diplomatic options. The political leadership refused to accept the postwar order but had very little power to change it. This anxiety was not lost on foreign onlookers. As one traveler cleverly put it, Hungary was a “country grinding her teeth.”⁴³ But in reality it did more than “grind” those teeth and shout “*Nem! Nem! Soha!*” (No! No! Never!—referring to the unwillingness to accept the territorial losses of Trianon). Hungarians indeed devised and carried out a highly sophisticated public relations campaign, but to what end? Could a happy audience of, for instance, Béla Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle*—as magnificent as it is—change the way a foreign government viewed Hungarian political goals? Joseph Nye argues that measuring which cultural assets should be utilized can be done by taking opinion polls and organizing focus groups—tools that were not yet available to the practitioners of interwar cultural diplomacy.⁴⁴ Does cultural diplomacy have the power to produce tangible results in policy outcomes? Under what circumstances? These are just some of the questions I will answer in the concluding chapter, one that admittedly seeks to raise more questions than to provide definitive answers.

Great Expectations and Interwar Realities looks to move beyond questions about the success and/or failure of Hungarian interwar cultural diplomacy and offers a new interpretation of interwar diplomatic history and national identity construction in East-Central Europe. I want to emphasize that this is not a study about the rights and wrongs of the postwar treaties in general; nor it is a re-evaluation of the Treaty of Trianon. Without a doubt, territorial revisionism was the leitmotif of both traditional and cultural diplomacy in Hungary, just as securing the postwar status quo motivated Romanian, Yugoslav, and Czechoslovak diplomacy. However, my study seeks to better understand the shared experience of this cultural and political moment in Europe. Hungarian sociologist and political thinker István Bibó

⁴³ Haruko Ichikawa, *Japanese Lady in Europe* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1937), 357.

⁴⁴ Nye, *Soft Power*, 16.

penned an excellent study in 1946 with a telling title: “The Misery of the Small East European States.” Bibó argued that the “hysteria” that characterized the region’s political life was the result of uncertainties and fears over territorial status and the very existence of a nation.⁴⁵ This sort of existential anxiety and talk of the “death of a nation,” Bibó continued, might have been an “empty phrase” to Western Europeans, but to the people of Eastern Europe it was a tangible reality.⁴⁶ Indeed, to Hungarians, Czechoslovaks, Poles, and the like—not to mention Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians—their very existence as a nation-state was, and continued to be, a real concern and a source of tremendous apprehension.

To the small nation-states of the region, cultural diplomacy was a rational and pragmatic choice. To these countries, not having powerful friends was not an option, for their fears were certainly not without foundation. It is enough to recall what took place in Munich during the autumn of 1938. Czechoslovakia—a status-quo-seeking and for the most part democratic nation—disappeared from the map of Europe with the blessing of the Great Powers of Europe. From the perspective of these countries, interwar European history looks different. Thus I suggest that we view the region’s history—and within that Hungarian history—between the wars for what it was, not what followed. In other words, we should view the period not as a prelude to World War II but as a postlude to World War I, with all its anxieties, failures, and successes.⁴⁷

The history of European international relations between the wars is not complete without pointing out the shortcomings of the international system and the Great Powers who failed to listen to and understand the region they helped to create. However, those shortcomings

⁴⁵ István Bibó, “A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága,” in *Harmadik út: politikai és történeti tanulmányok*, ed. Zoltán Szabó (London: Magyar Könyves Céh, 1960), 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁷ My thinking on the issue is indebted to Holly Case’s *Between States*, as well as Eric Weitz’s and Eberhard Kolb’s work on Weimar Germany. For more, see Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. P. S. Falla and R. J. Park (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); and Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

are not the whole story. I want to avoid what Konrad Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger call the “obsessive preoccupation with the role of one’s own nation as either victims or a perpetrator.”⁴⁸ Hungarian leaders—like their counterparts in the region—had agency and made choices, choices they saw as rational. In the case of Hungary, the small country’s delusional search for greatness, combined with a curious and ultimately toxic “sense of superiority” and “sense of inferiority,” certainly limited its options as much as being a small European country did.⁴⁹ In the end, this is a history of grand expectations, sobering realities, and intended and unintended consequences.

⁴⁸ Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, “Contours of a Critical History of Contemporary Europe: A Transnational Agenda,” in *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 16.

⁴⁹ This “sense of superiority” and a “sense of inferiority” and their connections to national imaginaries—and the argument that they are “never innocent”—were put forward by Michael Geyer and referenced by Michael David-Fox. See Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Introduction,” in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37; and David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 24–25.

Chapter 1

Mobilizing the Nation: From War Propaganda to Peacetime Cultural Diplomacy and Beyond

“We are not highwaymen, we are not a nation of Gypsies; now and for all time, we object to being represented as some sort of outlaw nomadic nation, barbaric, savage, a nation of highwaymen, a country of wranglers . . .”

— *Mihály Károlyi*, 1915¹

On October 17, 1918, István Tisza announced to the Hungarian Parliament: “I must acknowledge that what Count Mihály Károlyi said yesterday is the truth. We have lost this war.” He continued, “we could make our enemy’s final victory an expensive one . . . yet we have no more hope of winning this war, hence we must seek a peace.” The former prime minister called for unity and explained that one of the main tasks was to correct all the errors and misunderstandings about the nation that existed abroad. Hungarians’ “sublime duty” was to work on altering the country’s foreign image, so it could remain, as in the past, a factor in human progress and liberty in Central Europe.² Despite his resigned tone, Tisza, and most of the house, looked forward to the Wilsonian peace with cautious optimism, believing that

¹ *Képviselőházi napló*, 1910, vol. 27, 318 (December 7, 1915).

² *Képviselőházi napló*, 1910, vol. 41, 290–98 (October 17, 1918).

Hungary would retain its place within the European community with its territorial integrity untouched. Neither he nor the members could have foreseen that two weeks later, Tisza would be murdered, the country would descend into internal disorder, and successive governments would face foreign occupation before Hungary would be forced to accept the terms of the Paris peacemakers.

Ever since the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungarians sought to find an explanation for it. Hungarian historiography now concludes that four main factors contributed to the decision that essentially transformed Hungary from a partner nation of a mid-level Great Power to one of the weak and dependent nation-states of reconstituted East-Central Europe. First, the nineteenth-century national awakenings of the non-Magyar nationalities within the Kingdom of Hungary and the lack of positive response from the Hungarians created a situation whereby internal unity under Hungarian leadership was unsustainable. Second, the neighboring states' and emigrant groups' wartime irredentism provided support for the country's non-Magyar nationalities. Third, the victorious powers' secret treaties and agreements, combined with real and perceived strategic considerations, made Hungarian dreams of retaining territorial integrity impossible. Finally, the country's internal turmoil, in conjunction with violence and radicalization, significantly weakened the country's position in Paris.³ Most, though not all, Hungarian historians agree on these points, but it took nearly one hundred years to arrive at this conclusion. I do not think the post-Trianon intellectual and political elite was entirely blind to these factors. Nevertheless, for the most part, they refused to acknowledge them and instead sought different causes, ranging from a Freemason and Jewish conspiracy through the ignorance of the peacemakers to Hungary's negative image abroad. The latter was especially convenient, for it suggested that something could be done to change it. While we can say with certainty that propaganda was not the main factor in the peacemakers' decision at Trianon, it would be a mistake to entirely discard the issue, if for no other reason than Hungarians believed, or wanted to believe, that the sole reason for the terms they were forced

³ Ignác Romsics, *A múlt arcai: történelem, emlékezet, politika* (Budapest: Osiris, 2015), 360.

to accept was that the Great Powers misunderstood or did not know the country. As a small and powerless country, Hungary could not hope to alter the new geopolitical reality, but its elite hoped that a carefully constructed and active cultural-diplomatic campaign would help them to do so. This chapter seeks to explain the road leading to Hungarian realization of the perceived importance of a foreign image and aims to chronologically describe the internal and external factors that influenced the thinking of those in charge of the country's diplomatic and cultural-diplomatic efforts.

From the Emergence of Wartime Propaganda to the Changing Nature of International Relations

During World War I, techniques of mass persuasion were important weapons in the belligerents' arsenal. Historians have studied this propaganda but focused their attention on Allied efforts against Germany.⁴ Studies of British anti-German propaganda often point to the key role that Lord Northcliffe's Crewe House played in gathering much-needed public support for British war efforts. It is only recently that historians, most significantly Mark Cornwall, have turned their attention to the practice and influence of propaganda on the Eastern Front.⁵

The British propaganda campaign against Austria-Hungary was also conducted by Crewe House.⁶ In his 1920 publication about Crewe

⁴ For example, see Michael L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁵ Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Macmillan, 2000). See also József Galántai, *Magyarország az első világháborúban, 1914–1918* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974). For a more recent work, see Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914–1918* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1997).

⁶ It was in February 1918 that Viscount Northcliffe (born Alfred Charles William Harmsworth), the British newspaper and publishing tycoon, accepted Prime Minister Lloyd George's invitation to become "director of propaganda in enemy countries." Crewe House was the name of the building from which British propaganda was directed. Its name became synonymous with the activity carried out under its roof.

House, Sir Campbell Stuart, Northcliffe's deputy director, triumphantly wrote that the operation against Austria-Hungary was British propaganda's "most striking success."⁷ Lord Northcliffe, as he was known both at home and abroad, was owner of the *Times*, the *Observer*, the *Sunday Dispatch*, and the *Daily Mirror*, and used his considerable influence to recruit editors, politicians, and intellectuals. Two of these recruits were R. W. Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed. Seton-Watson was a trained historian, while Steed was a journalist and the *Times* Vienna correspondent between 1902 and 1913.⁸ Seton-Watson and Steed co-directed the operation of the Austro-Hungarian section, the first unit of the Crewe House to begin operations.

The section had two goals. The first was to provide moral and concrete support to the various nationalities within the Habsburg Empire. By stirring up existing nationalist sentiments, the section aimed to handicap the Dual Monarchy's army.⁹ The second was to destroy Austria-Hungary as a political entity. This was especially problematic, since there was considerable opposition in Great Britain to doing so. In his rather self-aggrandizing memoir, *Through Thirty Years*, Steed referred to this opposition as "Jew hornets," "Jesuit hornets," "British snob hornets," and other "pro-German hornets."¹⁰ What he found most troubling was the supposed influence of German-Jewish international finance, "militant Roman Catholicism," and the "snobbishness of British 'society' which looked upon 'Austrians' as 'nice people' because," Steed asserted bitterly, "their country houses were well kept, their shooting was excellent, and their urbanity superior to that of the

⁷ Sir Campbell Stuart, *Secrets of the Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 20. Stuart wrote in the preface that the publication of his book "had to be postponed until the main principles of the Peace had been decided." The main reason for the delay was that the nature of some of the documents "might have embarrassed the Allied Governments," Stuart admitted. Then he went on to say that during the war and the subsequent peace negotiations, the knowledge of the Crewe House and its workings had to be withheld from the public. See Stuart, *Secrets*, vii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), 198.

Germans.”¹¹ In the case of Hungary, Seton-Watson and Steed faced the fact that because of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and Lajos Kossuth’s subsequent tour of the West, Hungary enjoyed a degree of respect in Great Britain. Steed was keen to destroy the myth of Hungary as a country with a “system of liberal and progressive self-government.”¹²

The propaganda campaign greatly benefited from the cooperation between Seton-Watson and Steed on the one side and various émigré intellectuals, such as Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Ratislav Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, on the other. The latter three established the Czechoslovak National Council in February 1916. In his 1916 pamphlet *Détruisez l’Autriche-Hongrie! Le martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques* (“Destroy Austria-Hungary! The Martyrdom of the Czech-Slovaks”), Beneš left little doubt about their determination to undo the Dual Monarchy.¹³ This message resonated with many Croatian, Serb, and Romanian nationalists. The relationship between the émigrés and Crewe House was mutually beneficial. Steed and Seton-Watson provided a platform for them, while their presence lent credibility to Crewe House’s propaganda. It was in this spirit of cooperation that Masaryk, with the help of Seton-Watson and Steed, secured a lecturing position at London’s King’s College and founded the Czech Press Bureau in London.¹⁴ The two assisted in the creation of the Press Bureau’s propaganda publications, including *La Nation Tchèque* and *The New Europe*.¹⁵

These publications, especially the latter, were presented as scholarly journals, lending credibility to their propaganda. In these publications Seton-Watson, Steed, and émigré politicians sowed seeds of distrust about the Dual Monarchy’s ability to secure peace and began the campaign that presented Hungary as the domineering force within

¹¹ Ibid., 129.

¹² For example, see Henry Wickham Steed, “Nemesis in Hungary—Future of the Magyars—A Tyrant Oligarchy,” *The Times*, January 20, 1915, 9.

¹³ Edvard Beneš, *Détruisez l’Autriche-Hongrie! Le martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques* (Paris: Delagrave, 1916). The English-language translation was published under the title *Bohemia’s Case for Independence* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1917).

¹⁴ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 40–41.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the empire, one almost solely responsible for the war. For example, Seton-Watson explained the origins of World War I in *The New Europe*: “. . . this is not only a German War, but also a Magyar War. Nay more, it is as much a Magyar War as it is a German War: for the Magyars have done more than any other people to create that electrical atmosphere in South-Eastern Europe which produced the fatal explosion.”¹⁶ The journal drove home the point about Hungary’s war guilt. In a 1917 article, Seton-Watson introduced Hungarian prime minister István Tisza simply as “the masterful Tisza, whom our reader knows as one of those responsible for the European war.”¹⁷ Another approach used atrocity stories to establish parallels between “Teutonic Huns” and “savage Magyars.” Once again, *The New Europe* illustrates this point. “It is not the custom of *The New Europe* to deal with atrocities,” the editorial begins. However, for all who asked why Yugoslavs and Czechs did not favor home rule within the Dual Monarchy, the journal offered a document, supposedly based on a report from the Croatian newspaper *Novosti*, about the brutality of Hungarian soldiers in the Balkans, a “veritable Witches’ Sabbath, which filled the spectators with loathing and horror.” The editor asserted as a fact that a “single Magyar battalion had 1,000 yards of rope with it, when it was sent from Sarajevo to the frontier. At Tuzla over 300 Serbs were seen hanging on trees.”¹⁸ These atrocity stories, coupled with other propaganda themes, offered an introduction to the history, culture, and politics of the various nationalities that comprised the Habsburg Empire. The general idea was to emphasize that the southern Slavs, Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks suffered under the yoke of their Hungarian and German overlords, hence creating a need for postwar territorial reorganization.¹⁹

¹⁶ R. W. Seton-Watson, “The Roumanians of Hungary,” *The New Europe* 1, no. 1 (October 19, 1916–January 11, 1917): 20.

¹⁷ Rubicon [R. W. Seton-Watson], “Half-Gods in Hungary,” *The New Europe* 4, no. 41 (July 26, 1917): 38.

¹⁸ “How Austria-Hungary Treats the Yugoslavs,” *The New Europe* 5, no. 60 (October 18, 1917): 153–57.

¹⁹ According to historian Tibor Glant, anti-Habsburg and anti-Hungarian propaganda in the United States employed four themes: 1) prove war guilt; 2) use atrocity stories; 3) emphasize the historical and cultural accomplishments of the various nationalities; and 4) offer a plea for support regarding the postwar reorganization of Austria-Hungary. While Glant’s study

To centralize anti-Habsburg propaganda and win support for the destruction of the Dual Monarchy, Crewe House organized inter-allied propaganda conferences. There were meetings in Paris (March 6–8, 1918) and then in the Crewe House in London (March 14, 1918), before the establishment of the Central Inter-Allied Propaganda Commission or Padua Commission (April 18, 1918–June 1918).²⁰ The Padua Commission, organized in cooperation with the Italian High Command, built an impressive network that included links to the Czechoslovak National Council, the Yugoslav Committee, and of course, Crewe House. According to the painstaking research of Mark Cornwall, during its seventeen months of existence, the Padua Commission produced 492 different leaflets in ten languages.²¹

With the help of émigrés, anti-Habsburg and anti-Hungarian propaganda appeared on the other side of the Atlantic as well. The Bohemian National Alliance's diligence was essential in bringing the "Czechoslovak question" to the American political arena. The Alliance and the Slav Press Bureau, with its close ties to the Czechoslovak National Council, made its initial move before the United States entered the war. These organizations sent individual letters, along with copies of Tomáš Čapek's *The Slovaks of Hungary: Slavism and Panslavism* and copies of *The New Europe*, to every senator and representative.²² In September 1917, when President Wilson established the Inquiry, a collection of scholars to examine the European situation and advise him, Czechoslovak émigrés were ready. The organization was directed by Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson's chief foreign policy advisor. Among its members were the founding editor of the *New Republic*, Walter Lippmann; geographer Isaiah Bowman; and historian James Shotwell. The Czechoslovak National Council, some argued,

establishes these approaches in connection to propaganda carried out in the United States, I think that these factors are more than applicable to this analysis as well. Tibor Glant, *Through the Prism of the Habsburg Monarchy: Hungary in American Diplomacy and Public Opinion During World War I* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1998. Distributed by Columbia University Press), 147.

²⁰ Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 197, 202–28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 445–53.

²² Charles Pergler, *America in the Struggle for Czechoslovak Independence* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company Publishers, 1926), 58–64.

greatly benefited from the Inquiry's and Wilson's lack of geographical, historical, and cultural knowledge of the region. As the last Austro-Hungarian ambassador to the United States, Konstantin Dumba, put it, "the utter ignorance of facts and geography displayed by Wilson . . . were the Czechs' best allies."²³ While we now know that the peace-makers had ample knowledge of the region and its ethnic complexity, Czechoslovak nationalists nevertheless convinced the Wilson administration that Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks formed a single cohesive ethnic unit. Just as importantly, they successfully conveyed the idea that the new Czechoslovak state, which was to replace oppressive Habsburg rule, would be a model democracy upholding the ideals of the American Revolution.²⁴

Other émigré groups also found ways to influence American public opinion. The style and message of Romanian-born American writer Konrad Bercovici, for example, differed little from those of his counterparts publishing in London and Paris. His article, "Hungarian Lust for World Power," presented Hungarians to American readers as follows: "The cruelty and intolerance of the Magyars is as proverbial in the Balkans as is their arrogance and stupidity. Long of arms, bowlegged, with fierce mouth and deep-seated, small eyes, the Magyar is the typical savage of history. Like his brother, the Teuton, he is an abject slave and a horrible master."²⁵ He argued that if the United States did not take charge of the region, the consequences would be nothing short of horrific:

After this war is over Eastern Europe will be turned into a charnel-house. The mad passion, the blood lust so long repressed of all those thinly veneered barbarians [Hungarians, Germans, and Turks] will be given free play. Dark days are awaiting Eastern Europe. The peaceful readjustment of boundaries based on equi-

²³ Quoted in Nicole Marie Phelps, "Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the New Liberal Order: US-Habsburg Relations and the Transformation of International Politics, 1880–1924" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2008), 318.

²⁴ Ibid., 318–19.

²⁵ Konrad Bercovici, "Hungarian Lust for World Power," *New York Times*, May 17, 1918, 53.

table principles of nationality will only be possible if a strong and disinterested hand directs it. Like the German, the Magyar does not desire a place in the sun; he wants all the space under the great luminary. There is only one way to prevent terrible bloodshed in the Near East at the close of this war—the United States Government must see to it that all the nations of the Balkan Peninsula form a federated republic like our own. This would prevent future wars and save the Balkan peoples from the Kultur of the Teuton, Turk, and Magyar.²⁶

Austria-Hungary lost the propaganda war. While the Dual Monarchy also carried out propaganda, it was more limited in scope. It depicted the monarchy as a bulwark of European culture against the barbaric tides from the East. Newspapers argued that Russia was a deadly threat to European ideals of liberty and honor: it was a war of worldviews and battle of cultures. The Dual Monarchy also carried out a largely unsuccessful propaganda campaign against Italy.²⁷ The *Kriegspresse-quartier* (War Press Office), a unit within the *Armeeoberkommando* (Austrian High Command), controlled press releases and regulated both domestic and foreign correspondence.²⁸ To counter the influence of enemy propaganda, both the Austrian and the Hungarian halves of the empire introduced strict press censorship. But this is as far as their efforts went. In general, most of the Austro-Hungarian leadership remained cold to the idea of propaganda. Emperor Karl I of Austria (Karl IV in Hungary), grandnephew of Franz Josef, summarized his view on propaganda when he reiterated that ideas “could not be recommended like laxatives, toothpaste, and foodstuff,”²⁹ a judgment similar to that of the former Austro-Hungarian chief of staff, Franz

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 74–104.

²⁸ Andrea Orzoff, “The Empire without Qualities: Austro-Hungarian Newspapers and the Outbreak of War in 1914,” in *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War*, ed. Troy R. E. Paddock (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Press, 2004), 167, 172, and 185.

²⁹ Ibid., 186.

Conrad von Hötzendorf, who viewed the Entente propaganda campaign as despicable, vulgar, and dishonorable.³⁰

In the end Austria-Hungary not only failed in the propaganda war but lost the actual war. There were many reasons for the collapse of the Monarchy. Most historians would agree that it was the Monarchy's failure to unite its people, to secure their continued loyalty and to offer something in exchange, and the overall stresses of war that led to the dissolution. The role of propaganda in this collapse and the actual influence of propaganda in the decision to dissolve the monarchy and establish nation-states could be debated. The crucial fact remains that the Hungarian elite were convinced that losing the propaganda war was one of the reasons for losing the Great War.

Hungarian propaganda inactivity during the war does not mean that there were no voices calling for action. On December 7, 1915, in a speech in the Hungarian Parliament, Count Mihály Károlyi, one of the country's few self-identified pacifists, emphasized the need for genuine electoral and constitutional reform, not least because this would prove to the world that the Hungarian nation was just as civilized as any other: "We are not highwaymen [*betyár*], we are not a nation of Gypsies; now and for all time, we object to being represented as some sort of outlaw nomadic nation, barbaric, savage, a nation of highwaymen, a country of wranglers [*csikós nemzet*] . . ."³¹ Even conservative statesmen like Count Albert Apponyi addressed the question of the country's foreign image, pointing rather bitterly to the role that Lord Northcliffe's media empire and the Reuters monopoly played in Hungary's foreign presentation. However, he too emphasized that it was hardly surprising, for Hungarians had failed to provide information about the nation's achievements, just as they had failed to combat the negative depiction of the country in the foreign press

³⁰ "While we conducted the war according to traditional practices, our enemy did so with all the tricks of modern skullduggery. . . . In a vulgar fashion, the Entente states soiled the chivalrous clothing of their soldiers with a dirty filth of a base and despicable propaganda, which reckoned on the grossest stupidity and depravity of the masses." Quoted in Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, 8.

³¹ *Képviselőházi napló, 1910*, vol. 27, 318 (December 7, 1915).

and public opinion.³² The journalist-turned-diplomat Gyula Gesztesi argued that no nation aside from Germany was more “hated” than Hungary. The reason, he claimed, was the lack of Hungarian efforts to establish an organized “media policy.” Gesztesi pointed out that the Ukrainian National Press Bureau in 1916 alone produced thirty-six daily (and weekly) papers and magazines in Ukrainian, French, English, German, Hungarian, Russian, and even Esperanto and circulated them in cities such as Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, Munich, and Cleveland. Even more eye-opening for Hungarians, continued the author, should have been the success of the efforts of Czechs and Yugoslavs. Gesztesi argued that after the 1848 Revolution, the Hungarian elite paid due attention to media and Hungary’s image. The Hungarian émigré press bureau in Brussels helped keep Hungarians’ struggle at the forefront of the minds of people on the Continent and beyond. He further argued that this sort of commitment to European public opinion was necessary and should be the example to follow.³³ Imre Delej, vice president of the Hungarian Association in Berlin, pointed out that since the focus was on Hungary because of the war, the government should utilize this moment. He implored Budapest to organize information services and lectures, similarly to Germany’s *Aufklärungsdienst*, to end the situation in which Hungary was unknown abroad or, “even worse,” Hungarians were thought of as Austrians.³⁴ In December 1918, another intellectual, Alpár Rejőd, argued that Hungary could no longer afford to ignore international public opinion and needed to view the “past ten years of self-conscious work” of the surrounding nationalities as an example. He was especially critical of the Hungarian government’s neglect of émigré communities, telling the story of a high-ranking Hungarian diplomat who refused to hold events in Hungarian clubs abroad because to him “beer-breath-smelling” clubs and their “bowling nights” were not acceptable places for infor-

³² Gróf [Count] Albert Apponyi, “Előszó,” in Gyula Gesztesi, *A magyarság a világsajtóban: magyar sajtópolitika* (Budapest: Dick Manó, 1918), 1–12. This collection of studies first appeared in 1916 and 1917 on the pages of *Új Nemzedék*.

³³ Gesztesi, *A magyarság a világsajtóban*, 14–17.

³⁴ Imre Delej, “Magyar tanfolyamok Berlinben,” *Pesti Napló*, September 25, 1915, 11. My thanks goes to Michael Miller for this article.

mation exchange. Rejőd argued that Hungary could not afford this sort of attitude and had to use every available means to promote itself abroad.³⁵ By the end of 1918, Hungary needed a sympathetic foreign audience more than ever, because Western powers were gathering in Paris to decide upon the future of the region. Yet before the Great Powers gathered in the French capital, revolutionary changes were taking place in Hungary that illustrated the need for international recognition even more.

Hungarian Dreamland and Its Destruction, 1918–1920

Mihály Károlyi demanded swift and concrete action. Fearing that the existing government would not be able to deal with the domestic situation, he called for the resignation of the cabinet and the proclamation of an independent Hungary:

The most important thing is to make peace. It would be a sin to support any illusion contrary to this fact. . . . In the foreign political situation, just as in the domestic state of affairs, we are facing entirely novel problems, hence we must follow a new orientation. The political course followed thus far has utterly failed. . . . In the future we ought to conduct a nationality policy that corresponds with the spirit of the time. . . . We must openly take a new stand on the basis of pacifism, and we must accept this as the sole foundation of our future.³⁶

On November 1, after receiving news that the emperor had named Count János Hadik as prime minister despite the fact that he represented the old regime, Budapest rose in revolt. The short and, with the important exception of the assassination of István Tisza, relatively bloodless revolution triumphed, and the National Council under the

³⁵ Alpár Rejőd, *A külföldi propaganda új alapjai* (Budapest: Károlyi György kő-és könyvnyomdája, 1919), 1–8. The pamphlet was published in the series sponsored by the World Federation of Hungarians (Külföldi Magyarok Világszövetsége). I thank Michael Miller for sending this source to me.

³⁶ Károlyi, quoted in *Az Est*, October 17, 1918, 1.

presidency of Károlyi took power.³⁷ In an essay entitled “At the First Moment,” Hungary’s famed poet Mihály Babits declared that the triumph of the revolution was a miracle, an achievement that transformed the “feudal, half-dead, militaristic Hungary of Tisza” into an “independent, liberal, and radical republic.”³⁸ Even Károlyi’s political opponents, who included his father-in-law Count Gyula Andrassy the Younger, gave their support. Andrassy later wrote that “public opinion expected an immediate and favorable peace only from Károlyi, a fact which gave him and the revolution an enormous power. Even Károlyi’s greatest enemies wanted him to take power.”³⁹ Károlyi’s wife remembered how Andrassy accepted political defeat: “Now it is Mihály’s turn. He bet on the winning horse. Now he must show what he can do! We all must support him in this situation.”⁴⁰ With the support of nearly the entire country, Károlyi had every reason to believe that he and his government could take on any challenge, internal or external. At this moment the country, its people, and its leadership arrived at the stage historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls the “state of unreality—or dreamland.”⁴¹ Perhaps surprisingly, one of the foreign prophets of this newly independent “dreamland” was President Wilson.

³⁷ The Károlyi-led bourgeois democratic revolution and its legacy is still a divisive issue in Hungary. Closer examination of the topic is outside the purview of this study. I am interested in it insofar as it shows the way Hungarians gravitated toward propaganda and cultural diplomacy. For more on the topic, see the works of György Litván; Iván Völgyes, ed., *Hungary in Revolution 1918–19* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918–1919 and the Big Three* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968).

³⁸ Mihály Babits, “Az első pillanatban,” *Nyugat* 21–22 (1918), http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/index_abc_sz.htm (accessed December 18, 2011).

³⁹ Count Julius Andrassy, *Diplomacy and the War* (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1921), 285.

⁴⁰ Mihályné Károlyi [Mrs. Mihály Károlyi], *Együtt a forradalomban* (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1973), 261.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Co., 2003), 10.

After his January 8, 1918, speech, in which he laid out his famous Fourteen Points, the American president enjoyed unprecedented popularity in Hungary. Most papers carried his speech. Wilson's collected works became a national bestseller and flew off the shelves with such speed that they had to be reprinted. "Since the Wilsonian principles will become the foundation of the forthcoming peace treaty," argued a Budapest daily, "it is the duty of all cultivated men to know and understand the works of the American president."⁴² The general public believed he was the "only politician in the world who will be able to forge peace."⁴³ The sudden rise of Wilsonianism can be explained not by investigating Wilsonian principles per se, but rather how Hungarians perceived them. Many believed in the promise of Wilsonianism and its program for ending the war. More importantly, perhaps, they believed in it as an ideology that could solve the challenges Hungary was facing. Many believed that President Wilson's principles were compatible with the leadership's aims, which were to maintain the country's territorial integrity through a system of confederation and the institution of a plebiscite. Károlyi advocated "safeguarding and assuring" autonomy for the nationalities within Hungary, which were to be reorganized and reformed in the "spirit of civic democracy, universal equality and civic liberty," as expounded by Wilson.⁴⁴ This "Hungarian Wilsonianism" was the only ideological choice that offered the possibility of Hungary's rapprochement, as an independent country, with the Western world. Moreover, Wilson's demand for the democratization of the Monarchy legitimized the revolution and the aims of the Károlyi government. As Károlyi himself said: "I loathe more and more the social order of the old world with its injustice, cruelty, corruption and falsehood; I longed for a more humane one based on the works read in my youth and to which now I reverted, through the impetus of Wilsonian ideals."⁴⁵ For Károlyi, internationalism and pacifism was a matter of conviction. He was

⁴² "Wilson beszédei és üzenetei," *Az Est*, December 10, 1918, 7.

⁴³ "Miért fordult a monarchia Wilsonhoz?" *Az Est*, October 6, 1918, 5.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Gyula Mérei, *A magyar októberi forradalom és a polgári pártok* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969), 153.

⁴⁵ Mihály Károlyi, *Memoirs of Michael Károlyi: Faith without Illusion*, trans. Catherine Karolyi (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1957), 85.

especially influenced by the “type of pacifism Wilson preached.”⁴⁶ In his memoir, he recalled that Wilson’s pacifism was a historical force behind his fight, arguing that it offered a new outlook, new prospects, and the assurance of a new world for all humankind.⁴⁷ “We had confidence in the democratic and pacifist quality of public opinion and especially in the policy of President Wilson, a policy that stood higher than any mere nationalism,” wrote Oszkár Jászi, Károlyi’s minister of nationalities.⁴⁸ Károlyi was also confident, mistakenly, that Wilson’s vision would triumph: “My foreign policy is based on Wilsonian ideals. We have only one ideology: Wilson, Wilson, and for the third time Wilson. I am sure that Wilson will win not only in America but in Europe as well. The role of America is to remake Europe, extirpating the idea of revenge and creating a peace that will not leave people embittered.”⁴⁹

The nationality question was, as Jászi readily acknowledged, “the Archimedes point for the future of Hungarian democracy and independence.”⁵⁰ The relationship between the Magyar elite and the non-Magyar nationalities had been steadily declining since 1848 and worsened after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, or Compromise. The non-Magyar nationalities, with the exception of the Croats, did not receive the rights and privileges they hoped for. As the Nationalities Act, Act XLIV of 1868, stated:

In accordance with the basic principles of the Constitution, all subjects of Hungary politically form a single nation, the indivisible unitary Hungarian nation, of which every citizen, whatever his ethnic affiliation, is a member with equal rights. . . . By virtue of the political unity of the nation, the state language of Hungary being Hungarian, the sole language of debate and administra-

⁴⁶ Mihály Károlyi, *Egy egész világ ellen* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965), 215.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Oscar [Oszkár] Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1924), 37.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 90.

⁵⁰ Jászi, quoted in Péter Hanák, *Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1985), 51.

tion in the Hungarian parliament shall continue henceforth to be Hungarian.⁵¹

The subsequent generation went further. They refused all “aspirations to polyglot status” and referred to them as mere “political vulgarities.”⁵² A period of “Magyarization,” or forced assimilation of other nationalities, followed.⁵³ Some of the strongest measures of Magyarization were authorized by Count Albert Apponyi in the 1907 law known as “*Lex Apponyi*,” which ensured the dominance of Hungarian in education. Consequently, the number of ethnic schools was cut in half, and only 20 percent of the country’s primary schools were permitted to teach in non-Magyar languages.⁵⁴ The idea was to create a new type of “Magyar gentleman.” Contemporary historian Béla Grünwald depicted this transformation as a meat grinder: non-Magyar boys were forced in at one end, and Magyar gentlemen, alienated from their ethnic group and cultural heritage, emerged at the other.⁵⁵ The supremacy of the Magyars was well represented in all spheres of life. In 1910, approximately 96 percent of civil servants, 91.6 percent of all public employees, 96.8 percent of judges and public prosecutors, 91.5 percent of secondary school teachers, and 89 percent of medical doctors spoke, or claimed to speak, Hungarian as their mother tongue.⁵⁶ In the fall of 1918, when Károlyi dispatched Jászi to seek a compromise with the nationalities, he presented the idea of a Danubian Confederation, a federalized structure for the monarchy based on the Swiss model. The arrangement included five federal states: Hungary (without Croatia

⁵¹ Quoted in Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina and Osiris, 1999), 64–65.

⁵² Romsics, *Hungary*, 65.

⁵³ Some, like László Kontler, argue that the “dimensions of forced magyarization have been often exaggerated.” He asserts that “on the whole the treatment of the national minorities in Hungary before World War I could still be described as relatively tolerant, especially compared with contemporary Eastern and South-eastern Europe.” See László Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 292.

⁵⁴ Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, trans. Ann Major (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 300.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 300.

⁵⁶ Data in Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 301.

and Slavonia), Austria, the territories of the Czech Crown, Poland, and a Croatian-led Illyria that would include Serbia. Furthermore, there remained a possibility for enlargement with the joining of Romania. Since there were large numbers of minorities within all the proposed member states, Jászi guaranteed territorial and cultural autonomy.⁵⁷ Despite Károlyi's hopes, the plan offered too little and came too late.

The most debilitating issue Károlyi faced was the lack of international recognition of Hungary and his government. The Western powers had not only control over the new boundaries but also the power to confer or withhold recognition and legitimacy of the new states. Károlyi and his entourage traveled to Belgrade on November 8, 1918, to negotiate an armistice with the commander-in-chief of the Allied Army of the Orient, the French general Louis Franchet d'Esperey.⁵⁸ The armistice guaranteed Hungary's jurisdiction over its territory and determined military demarcation lines. The delegation left Belgrade with a sense of accomplishment. It did not realize that the Allied Supreme Council recognized the convention as being "of purely military character with no political significance"; thus it did not represent the political recognition that Károlyi sought.⁵⁹ The withholding of this acknowledgment encouraged the neighboring states to begin occupying Hungarian lands. In November and December, the Czechoslovak, Serbian, and Romanian armies occupied large parts of the country. The occupiers, disregarding the Belgrade convention's decision on Hungarian jurisdiction, did away with Hungarian public administration in these areas. There was virtually no military opposition. The returning 1.2 million troops were disarmed and discharged, which later contributed to Hungary's own "stab-in-the-back" legend.

⁵⁷ For more on this, see Oszkár Jászi, *Magyarország jövője és a Dunai Egyesült Államok* (Budapest: Új Magyarország Részvénytársaság, 1918); Oszkár Jászi, *Homage to Danubia*, ed. György Litván (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1995); and György Litván, "Oszkár Jászi's Danube Federation Theories," in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region*, ed. Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Peter Pastor, "Major Trends in Hungarian Foreign Policy from the Collapse of the Monarchy to the Peace Treaty of Trianon," *Hungarian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 5.

⁵⁹ Pastor, "Major Trends," 5.

Károlyi made repeated pleas to the Great Powers, personally appealing to Wilson to no avail. On January 18, 1919, the Paris Peace Conference opened without representation from the Károlyi government. Károlyi bitterly commented that “everyone is disappointed with me, yet nobody offers a helping hand. The Entente will not recognize my government, saying that it is not stable. Yet who could form a stable government under the current circumstances?”⁶⁰ He argued that excessive territorial demands from Czechoslovakia and Romania, combined with internal factors, endangered Hungarian democracy and aided the growth of Bolshevism.⁶¹ Romania’s Ion I. C. Brătianu, on the other hand, accused Károlyi of encouraging Bolshevism and argued that the Romanian incorporation of Transylvania was necessary to create a strong barrier against Bolshevik Russia. The Czechoslovak representatives, who, like their Romanian counterparts, made their territorial demands known in February, presented similar arguments.⁶² In early March, Károlyi publicly indicated that he would not sign a treaty enshrining territorial demands against Hungary; yet he also voiced his hopes that Wilsonian ideals would be victorious at the conference.⁶³ To promote his vision abroad, the Károlyi government established the Országos Propaganda Bizottság (National Propaganda Committee). This organ devised the slogan “*Nem! Nem! Soha!*” (“No! No! Never!”), which not only became the rallying cry of Hungarian irredentist organizations for years to come but became part of the foreign stereotype of Hungarians. On March 20, Colonel Vix (sometimes referred to as Vyx), the head of the Allied Military Mission in Budapest, presented Károlyi with the new territorial demands, known as the Vix Memorandum.⁶⁴ When Károlyi and his minister of defense, Vilmos Böhm, said the demands were unacceptable and might lead to the disintegra-

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Az Est*, January 29, 1919, 1.

⁶¹ See memorandum by J. E. Thornton reproduced in Miklós Lojtkó, ed., *British Policy on Hungary, 1918–1919: A Documentary Sourcebook* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1995), 48–53.

⁶² Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 522.

⁶³ Károlyi, quoted in *Az Est*, March 4, 1919, 4.

⁶⁴ On the negotiations and plans, see Mária Ormos, *From Padua to the Trianon 1918–1920*, trans. Miklós Uszkay (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

tion of a democratic government and even the growth of Bolshevism, Vix replied in German: "Das ist mir ganz egal" ("It is all the same to me").⁶⁵ The next day the Károlyi cabinet resigned, paving the way for the Bolshevik rule of Béla Kun. The Károlyi government ended largely because it failed to obtain the necessary international recognition. The Western powers' refusal to grant legitimacy to Károlyi also meant the end of the Hungarian experience with liberal democracy. Even Lloyd George acknowledged: "We cannot be blind to what has just happened in Hungary. Károlyi was favorable to us and endeavoring to work with us, but found no encouragement."⁶⁶

It was clear to everyone both at home and abroad that early support for Kun's Bolshevik regime was not the result of some sudden change of heart about its actual ideology.⁶⁷ Nationalist sentiment, not Bolshevism, allowed Kun to take power. He was aware of this as well. He promptly rejected the Vix Memorandum and began to establish the Hungarian Red Army. A number of leading former *k.u.k.* (*kaiserlich und königlich*, or imperial and royal army) officers joined Kun and promised to fight every enemy that threatened the country's territorial integrity. His saber-rattling did not go unnoticed. Fear of the Russian Red Army and the Bolshevik revolution in Germany further motivated the Great Powers. The Allied Commission sent the South African-British general Jan Smuts to negotiate with Kun. Smuts offered certain modifications to the Vix Memorandum and an invitation to the Paris Conference, the sort of international recognition that Károlyi was unable to secure. Yet the same force that put Kun in power also limited his freedom. He could not accept mere alterations; that would not satisfy the population. Kun was forced to act. Despite the patriotic fervor of the troops, the military brilliance of Lt. Colonel Aurél Stromfeld, and some success in Slovakia, the offensives failed. A shortage of food and other materials and the lack of hoped-for Russian support, coupled with the destabilizing and at times brutally executed policies of the government, led to the disintegration of the army. On August 1, 1919, Kun and some of his closest allies fled to Vienna, and from there to

⁶⁵ Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, 547.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin*, 147.

⁶⁷ See, for example, the analysis put forward by the *Times*: "Bolshevist Rule in Hungary," *The Times*, March 24, 1919, 12.

Moscow, while Romanian troops occupied Budapest. The counterrevolutionary forces led by the last admiral of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, Miklós Horthy, were gathering at the southern city of Szeged.

The conservative Horthy, unlike the pacifist Károlyi, received Allied recognition as the head of the Hungarian government.⁶⁸ In this recognition British, and to a lesser degree, American diplomats played an essential role. The victorious Entente Powers' Supreme Council sent Sir George Russel Clerk to Budapest to negotiate between Romanians and Hungarians. He was impressed by Horthy and reported that he "inspires confidence" and had the "probity and reliability" to govern.⁶⁹ Similarly positive reports arrived from the Americans, and according to historian Miklós Lojkó, British secretary of state for foreign affairs Sir George N. Curzon "cleared the way for the creation of Horthy's regency."⁷⁰ In his telegram to Thomas Beaumont Hohler, appointed high commissioner to Budapest, Curzon stated that "his Majesty's Government . . . had no objection to the selection of some notable Hungarian to the office of Head of Hungarian State . . . whether . . . elected king or Palatine or designed by any other title, provided he is established by lawful means."⁷¹

On March 1, 1920, the National Assembly elected Horthy as the Regent. The new state—whose exact form was not yet decided—faced grave challenges. Internally, the violence had not yet abated. During the White Terror, carried out in part as a retaliation for the preceding Red Terror, paramilitary troops brutalized the countryside. The final death toll was around 2,000, including many Jews who were labeled insti-

⁶⁸ After (and even during) Kun's regime there were a number of short-lived governments—those of Gyula Peidl, István Friedrich, and Károly Huszár.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Miklós Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe: Britain and the "Lands Between," 1919–1925* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 19–20. On the "Clerk Mission," see Lojkó, "Missions Impossible: General Smuts, Sir George Clerk and British Diplomacy in Central Europe in 1919," in *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919: Peace without Victory?* eds. Michael Dockrill and John Fisher (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 115–39; and György Ránki, "A Clerk-misszió történetéhez," *Történelmi Szemle* 10, no. 2 (1967): 156–87.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷¹ Quoted in Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe*, 23. The telegram was dated January 29, 1920.

gators and supporters of the Bolshevik regime. These events further diminished Hungary's image abroad.⁷² The second major issue was the peace treaty. Those in power clearly recognized that it had to be concluded without further delay. Albert Apponyi was dispatched to Paris, heading a delegation that still hoped to convince peacemakers to alter their original draft, to no avail. On June 4, 1920, despite Hungarian pleas for a plebiscite, representatives of the Kingdom of Hungary signed the Treaty of Trianon. The war was over, but a new war, a war waged on a different battlefield, had begun.

Hungary, 1920–1927: From Turmoil to Consolidation

In 1920 Hungary was economically fragile, politically divided, and internationally isolated. At Trianon the country lost its salt, gold, and silver mines. Only 38 percent of the railway network remained within the new borders. Once a leading exporter of timber, the country now relied on imports. Overall agricultural production in 1920 was 50–60 percent of that prior to the war. Industrial output in the same year was about 35–40 percent. A stagnant economy, coupled with rampant inflation, led to hunger and misery, especially for those 350,000 to 400,000 refugees arriving from the detached territories.⁷³ It soon became apparent that the country could not recover without substantial international loans. However, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, supported by France, opposed any loan to Hungary.⁷⁴

In addition to pressing economic problems, the country was politically divided. In 1920 the three political groups—democrats, right-wing radicals, and conservatives—had their daggers drawn. Somewhat unex-

⁷² These numbers are still hotly debated; estimates range between 600 and 6,000.

⁷³ Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* (Budapest: Osiris, 2005), 154.

⁷⁴ The question of reparations, a source of tension between the states, was closely connected with Hungary's ability to secure loans. For more, see Zoltan Peterecz, *Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and Hungary, 1924–1926: The United States, the League of Nations, and the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary* (London: Versita, 2012), 88–96.

pectedly, Horthy, though he came to power as a symbol of the radical right, appointed conservative Pál Teleki as his prime minister.

Count Pál Teleki was born on November 1, 1879, in Budapest. His father, Géza Teleki, was from one of the most influential and significant lines of Transylvanian aristocracy, while his mother, Irén Muráti, was from a bourgeois Budapest family of Greek origins. Young Teleki was the couple's only child, and by all accounts, he was weak and sickly. Very early on, he learned German and some Greek, for these were the two main languages spoken at home.⁷⁵ His primary education was conducted with the help of private tutors. He only showed up for exam times at his secondary school, but nevertheless, his grades were, for the most part, outstanding. He was an avid reader, and there was plenty for him to discover in the family's extensive library—which he cataloged himself. Teleki enrolled at the University of Budapest to study government and law. However, Teleki had plenty of time to enjoy the life of a young aristocrat, with its card games, dances, and travels. It was after he returned from his first foreign trip that his interest turned toward the study of geography. His curiosity about cultural geography led him to study under Lajos Lóczy, the father of modern Hungarian geography. It was then that he built a lifelong friendship with Jenő Cholnoky. Since his family required him to study agriculture, Teleki studied at Magyaróvár's Agricultural College. However, his interest was in geography, and finally he was able to secure an internship with Professor Lóczy. Following the family's wishes, he returned to Nagysomkút (today Șomcuta Mare in Romania) to enter local public service and in 1905 became a member of the House of Representatives. He also ran successfully—albeit not without controversy—in the 1906 elections, but he contributed very little to politics between 1906 and 1910; instead he focused on his first passion, geography. He traveled widely and started his work on an atlas and history of the European discovery of Japan, which was published in 1909, gaining considerable renown at home and abroad. In 1912, with his friend Cholnoky, he

⁷⁵ Teleki's legacy remains a controversial topic in Hungarian historiography, as well as in the country's public and political discourse. In my opinion, the most balanced biography on Teleki is Balázs Ablonczy's 2005 work, which served as the main source for this short biographical summary. See Balázs Ablonczy, *Teleki Pál* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005).

visited the United States. The cross-country trip made a great impression on him. In 1913 he was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It was around the same time that Teleki also became active in the Turáni Társaság (Turanian Society). By this time, he was married and the father of two children. Because of his weak physique, he did not complete the one-year volunteer military service customary among his peers. On the eve of World War I, he found himself a member of a new mobile reserve unit made up of people like Teleki, who were unfit for regular service but owned an automobile. Later on, he filled different posts as needed, but for the most part, he did not see the real horror of war. In mid-1916, after his return from the war, he ran for a recently opened position, and he became the delegate of the Keszthely district. The end of the war, however, brought new challenges for the nearly forty-year-old scientist-turned-politician. Initially, like most of the traditional political elite, Teleki supported Károlyi's bourgeois revolution, until it became clear that the country would not be able to retain its territorial integrity. After Béla Kun's takeover, Teleki left Switzerland (where he was conducting propaganda on behalf of the Károlyi government), traveled to Vienna to join Bethlen's Hungarian National Committee, and soon after, joined the counter-revolutionary government of Szeged as its foreign minister.⁷⁶ As leader of the Christian National Party (Keresztény Nemzeti Párt) and the representative of Szeged, he remained active in politics even after the dissolution of the Szeged government. He was also involved in the works that sought to gain favor for the Hungarians at the forthcoming peace negotiations, and when the Paris peace talks started, he was one of the country's official delegates. It was here that his famous ethnic map of pre-Trianon Hungary—the so-called “red map”—was first introduced.⁷⁷ In July 1920, he was named prime minister. It was a position that everybody involved—both at home and abroad, including Teleki himself—understood to be temporary in order to provide a transition for the coming government under István Beth-

⁷⁶ Ablonczy, *Teleki Pál*, 40–141 *passim*.

⁷⁷ Teleki's map was certainly not one of a kind. For a fascinating discussion about the creations and role of competing Hungarian and Romanian maps, see Case, *Between the States*, 39–48.

len.⁷⁸ Teleki curtailed the power of the paramilitary groups still terrorizing Budapest and the countryside. On the other hand, during his first term the Hungarian National Assembly passed Act XXV of 1920. The law, which became known as the *numerus clausus* act, called for a proportionate representation of races and nationalities in Hungarian higher education, with the intention of reducing the number of Jews therein. Essentially, it reclassified Jewishness as a racial/ethnic category, instead of a religious one as in the past, and produced the first anti-Jewish law of its kind in Europe, which some historians argue created a precedent.⁷⁹ Another domestic challenge was the status of Karl IV, the last emperor of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the apostolic king of Hungary, he laid claim to the throne, supported by royalist circles. He attempted to return and claim the throne twice in 1921. The first peaceful attempt, in the spring, failed. Because of protests and criticism from neighboring countries, Teleki resigned. Teleki's life and contribution will be illustrated throughout the book; thus for now, the following will, I trust, be sufficient to conclude his story. Between 1921 and 1938, Teleki, though he held no official government position, acted as the country's unofficial ambassador, one of the main architects of the ongoing revisionist campaign, and the chief scout of the Hungarian Boy Scout movement, to name just a few of his undertakings. In 1938 he returned to politics at the helm of the VKM under the Imrédy government; after its collapse, he returned once again as prime minister, a position he held until his suicide on April 3, 1941.

However, Teleki's resignation was not able to alleviate fears about the possibility of a Habsburg restoration and, in any case, provided a convenient excuse for Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to form an alliance—the Little Entente—against Hungarian revisionist

⁷⁸ Ablonczy, *Teleki Pál*, 168–69.

⁷⁹ See Victor Karády and Peter Tibor Nagy, eds., *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: Pasts Inc. Centre for Historical Research, History Department of the Central European University, 2012). It was during this time that Teleki really engaged with the “Jewish question.” Historian Balázs Ablonczy notes that Teleki's anti-Semitism, which would lead him to the *numerus clausus* and anti-Jewish laws, resulted in part from “shock” from the events of 1918–1919, especially that of the Hungarian Bolshevik revolution. See Ablonczy, *Teleki Pál*, 146–47.

aims. This posed an ongoing challenge to Hungary's new prime minister, Count István Bethlen, who took office in April 1921. A short biographical note might also be in order here, for Bethlen remained in power for more than a decade, and his conservative regime can be credited with the consolidation of conservative power, economic recovery, and stabilization.

Count István Bethlen was a scion of two of the oldest Transylvanian noble families: the Telekis and the Bethlens. István Bethlen was born on October 8, 1874, in the small Transylvanian village of Gernyeszeg (today Gornești in Romania) as the youngest of three children. He was seven years old when his father died. The loss caused the young Bethlen's mother's mental and physical health to decline rapidly, prompting a joint family committee to apply for and receive guardianship of him. He began his studies at the age of five with the help of private tutors. As his late father intended, at age nine Bethlen left Transylvania and enrolled at the Monarchy's most prestigious private boarding school for boys, the Theresianum in Vienna. Despite some early problems with illness and the German language, Bethlen made the transition. It was during these formative years that he developed his conservative worldview, not least because of the teachers and institutional leaders he had, such as Lajos Thallóczy, Gautsch von Frankenthurn, and Hussarek von Heinlein. In 1893 he enrolled at the University of Budapest to study government and law and spent half a year studying in various English universities. It was there that he developed a liking for the more conservative British system of politics. After two years of military service, he enrolled at the Agricultural College in Magyóvár (today Mosonmagyaróvár), the same college Teleki attended. He was twenty-six years old when he finished his studies, and as his biographer Ignác Romsics states, the man who returned to Transylvania to take charge of the family estate of Mezősámsond (today Șincai in Romania) was indeed an impressive young man whose skills and knowledge exceeded those of his peers.⁸⁰ Between 1901 and 1918, he oversaw his estate in Transylvania and entered into politics, mainly focusing on agrarian and nationality issues. During World War

⁸⁰ Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen István* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 15–29 *passim*.

I, he volunteered for service. He was in Budapest during the collapse of the monarchy and the subsequent bourgeois-democratic revolution of Károlyi, but he was on his way to Vienna as the Hungarian Bolsheviks took control of the country. In Vienna he was the accepted leader of the Anti-Bolshevik Committee (other sources refer to it as the Viennese Hungarian National Committee). He remained in Vienna as the representative of the counter-revolutionary Szeged government.⁸¹ Between April 14, 1921, and August 24, 1931, he was the prime minister of Hungary. During his reign—often referred to as the Bethlen Consolidation—Hungary was able to break out from its international isolation and stabilize its economic situation. Yet the country remained socially and politically divided. The new electoral law of 1922 curtailed the number of electors. After the 1919 reforms, 40 percent of the total population was entitled to vote. After the 1922 restructuring, this figure declined to 28 percent. This was not a uniquely Hungarian state of affairs. Similarly restrictive electoral systems were established by Yugoslavia (23 percent), Switzerland (25 percent), France (28 percent), and Belgium (30 percent), while much more inclusive electoral systems were created in Germany (61 percent), Austria (59 percent), and Great Britain (47 percent).⁸² Bethlen made a compromise with democratic and social-democratic forces but outlawed the Communist Party. Improving circumstances weakened support for the radical right. Many leading figures, from Gyula Gömbös to Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, gravitated toward Bethlen.⁸³ Even after his resignation, he continued to be the “Grand Old Man of Hungarian politics,” a face of revisionism, while because of his loyal connections, he continued to influence the country’s political development.⁸⁴ He remained convinced that Hungary needed to continue its friendly relationship with the West and cautioned against establishing too strong ties with

⁸¹ Ibid., 120–27.

⁸² Based on Hirata Takesi’s work, used in Romsics, *Magyarország*, 224.

⁸³ For more on domestic policy, in addition to Romsics’s study, see Thomas Lorman, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920–1925: István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006. Distributed by Columbia University Press). This book is an especially important source for understanding the 1922 election and the rapprochement between Bethlen and the Social Democrats.

⁸⁴ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, 342.

Nazi Germany. Even on the eve of the German occupation of Hungary, he still hoped that Great Britain might send paratroopers, but by that time the Gestapo was looking for him. For the next few months he hid in various places in the countryside, until, on December 7, 1944, he contacted the regional Soviet leadership. As a “guest” of the Soviet Union, he was placed under house arrest. Fearing his influence and prestige—both at home and abroad—the Soviet leadership decided to take him to Moscow, where, to the best of our knowledge, he died of natural causes on October 6, 1946.⁸⁵

The Horthy regime, while legally recognized, was internationally isolated. In 1922 only eight countries were not members of the League of Nations: Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, the United States, Bolshevik Russia, Turkey, and Hungary. The Bethlen government’s primary task was to break out of international and diplomatic isolation. In the early 1920s, Hungarian foreign policy was an ad-hoc activity. Because of the country’s isolation, there was very little room for maneuver. Various, often contradictory, plans were drafted. For example, the government aimed to begin secret negotiations with Czechoslovakia and Romania. Yet at the same time, it also reached out to Germany, Italy, and Bolshevik Russia, three states that had no interest in maintaining the status quo. Hungary made overtures toward Germany. However, Gustav Stresemann’s *Erfüllungspolitik*, which sought rapprochement with the rest of Europe, did not need a revisionist Hungary on its side. After the Soviet Union’s official establishment in 1922, some Hungarians saw it as a possible partner. After all, the Soviet Union was not invited to Paris, supported the idea of an independent Transylvania, had territorial claims against Romania, and was a potential trading partner. These overtures came to nothing because of the protests of right-wing groups and rigidly anti-Bolshevik conservative elements, the latter of which included Horthy himself. Despite Hungary’s admission to the League of Nations in September 1922, the country remained isolated. The Allied Military Commission closely monitored its finances and political developments. Finally, in the spring of 1924, Hungary received a loan from the League of Nations that was undersigned by Great Britain, the United States,

⁸⁵ Romsics, *Bethlen István*, 438–41.

Switzerland, and Italy. With the loan, Hungary not only obliged itself to pay reparations but also gave the League of Nations the right to oversee government spending. The budget was supervised by Jeremiah Smith, Jr., a financial lawyer from Boston.⁸⁶ Amid diplomatic isolation and financial difficulties, the Hungarian elite turned its attention toward cultural diplomacy.

On May 4, 1921, Parliament discussed the country's position in the arena of international public opinion. Count Gyula Andrássy the Younger pointed out the lessons of World War I as he reviewed a publication on the propaganda work of Lord Northcliffe. He argued that Hungary had to realize that in the current situation, armed conflict was out of the question, and there was no use for saber-rattling. Instead, he proclaimed, Hungary had to influence international public opinion.⁸⁷ His viewpoint was shared by most of the governmental and intellectual elite, who believed that the country's future was intimately connected with its foreign reputation. Most in these circles shared the widely held belief that the severity of the Trianon Treaty was the direct result of Hungary's being unknown or misunderstood. There was also a consensus on the reasons for Hungary's low status in international public opinion. First and foremost, there was enemy propaganda during World War I, which misrepresented Hungary's goals and character to the West, thus turning public opinion against the country. Klebelsberg, for example, argued that this sort of "slander" painted an "odious" picture about Hungarian aspirations and the Hungarian cause before the "grand forum of Europe."⁸⁸ While the political elite believed in its story of victimization, they also blamed the lack of Hungarian efforts to present Hungary and its achievements on the international stage. Klebelsberg addressed this matter, arguing that one of the greatest errors of the recent past was the political elite's almost single-minded

⁸⁶ Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 157. There are some outstanding studies on the topic of financial reconstruction. For example, see Zoltan Peterecz, *Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and Hungary, 1924–1926*; György Péteri, *Global Monetary Regime and National Central Banking: The Case of Hungary, 1921–1929* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2002); and Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe*.

⁸⁷ *Nemzetgyűlési napló*, 1920, vol. 9, 398–404 (May 4, 1921).

⁸⁸ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 22.

focus on domestic issues. Cultivating the country's foreign reputation was almost entirely eschewed, as if Hungary were not in the center of Europe but an island in the Pacific Ocean.⁸⁹

Predictably, Hungarian reaction to Trianon was one of universal disbelief, horror, and anger, not limited to any single political, social, or economic group. Revisionist propaganda started as soon as the treaty was signed, if not before. In the beginning the source of this propaganda was not the government but various private organizations with close ties to governmental circles. The Területvédő Liga (TEVÉL—League for the Protection of [Hungarian] Territory), Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület (MOVE—Hungarian National Defense Force Association), Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME—Association of Awakening Hungarians), and the Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség (Apostolic Cross Blood Alliance) were only a few of the dozens of organizations that carried out unofficial propaganda.⁹⁰ By 1921 the activities of these irredentist organizations, mostly right-wing, became so widespread that a Budapest daily asked the question: who actually makes the country's foreign policy? It concluded that the painful situation was that in the past, nobody wanted to make foreign policy, while now, everyone thought they should.⁹¹

Trianon created a challenging situation. On the one hand, as the Bethlen government attempted to consolidate its power, it could not afford to alienate the population by ignoring their disbelief, horror, and anger over the treaty. Nor did they want to, for anger over the treaty diverted attention from other very real domestic problems, such as the situation of the peasantry and the workers. On the other hand, ratification of the treaty (July 26, 1921) required the country to halt the activities of irredentist organizations. More importantly, irredentist propaganda was deemed harmful to the government's aim of joining the League of Nations and securing much-needed international loans while continuing its struggle to break out of isolation. There were certainly voices that called for action—some even for military action—but in the end, cooler heads prevailed. As Klebelsberg put it some years later, “in

⁸⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁰ For more on these organizations, see chap. 2 in Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*.

⁹¹ “Minden szó,” *Az Est*, July 24, 1921, 1.

1922 it would have been not only madness but straight-out comical for us to rattle our sabers, when indeed we had very few sabers to rattle.”⁹²

The government decided to take charge of revisionist propaganda. A confidential meeting between Prime Minister Bethlen, Minister of Foreign Affairs Miklós Bánffy, representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense, and the most influential leaders of societal organizations decided to suspend irredentist organizations and limit similar future activities.⁹³ This began a development, which was fully realized by 1927, whereby the unofficial propaganda, in its more direct and vitriolic fashion, was conducted by societal organizations, albeit often supported financially by the government, while the officially conducted activity was more indirect and less propagandistic and employed the tools of cultural diplomacy. This arrangement provided the government with plausible deniability when needed, allowed for control over content and quality, and, after 1927, gave the domestic public further evidence of the government’s commitment to revising the treaty.

The decision to assert government control over revisionist policy was prudent, for the government lacked connections, institutions, and organizations to compete in the new field of international public relations and thus could not afford to alienate international public opinion. Since the 1867 *Ausgleich*, Hungary and Austria had a joint foreign policy, and as such, joint foreign representation was directed from the Ballhausplatz in Vienna. According to Pál Pritz, a Hungarian historian and specialist on the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 292 of the Ballhausplatz’s 902 employees were Hungarian.⁹⁴ The Károlyi government announced the establishment of an independent Hungarian foreign ministry in December 1918. This amounted to little more than a rhetorical separation, since Károlyi was not recognized as the legal ruler of Hungary and could not offer a real alternative as the country’s reorganized foreign representation. For the most part, the personnel recruited during the Károlyi government remained in place under the Kun regime.

⁹² Kuno Klebelsberg, *Ötven harmincas évek!* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1930), 111.

⁹³ Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* (2009), 107. See also “Irredenta szervek,” *Az Est*, August 10, 1921, 1.

⁹⁴ Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1995), 20.

In October 1919, after the fall of Kun, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry (KÜM) moved to its permanent location in Dísz Square. The first embassy was in Vienna (during the Károlyi government), and it was not until mid-1920 that the second embassy, in the Vatican, was opened. Consulates and missions appeared in Berlin, Bern, and Warsaw, followed by the establishment of embassies in Paris (September 1920), London (June 1921), and Washington (January 1922).⁹⁵ By 1922 Hungary had some sort of diplomatic representation in fourteen places, and plans were made to establish more. However, as Pritz points out, most of these diplomatic missions were understaffed, without connections to the foreign political elite, and generally less than functional.⁹⁶

The establishment of the political intelligence division of the KÜM was a first step toward creating the necessary structure to carry out Hungary's cultural diplomacy. In 1920 Zoltán Gerevich suggested that the organ that had hitherto overseen preparations for the Treaties of Paris—the Békeelőkészítő Iroda—seemed to have lost its *raison d'être*. In his memo, however, he formulated the aforementioned division of labor whereby the government officially eschewed propaganda activities, leaving it to non-governmental organizations, and practicing what he called "scientific propaganda." The concept itself, while never really defined, suggests that the government decided to distance itself from emotionally charged, grievance-driven propaganda and instead turned toward historical, economic, and political arguments to justify the need for revision. Gerevich argued that the main targets of this "scientific propaganda" should be foreign political and intellectual circles. Furthermore, continued Gerevich, a central organ within the KÜM would enable the government to direct activities and coordinate with other governmental and non-governmental organs.⁹⁷ The exact date of this transition remains unknown. Documents suggest that the new division within the KÜM was indeed established, although its existence and much of its activity remained hidden until 1927. The main document that proves its existence is an order dated November 6, 1922, calling

⁹⁵ Ibid., 23–24.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁷ The document is reproduced in Pál Pritz, *Iratok a magyar külügyi szolgálat történetéhez, 1918–1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1944), 79–81.

for an internal review of the KÜM.⁹⁸ The subsequent memo—designated “*Szigorúan bizalmas!!!!*” (“Strictly Confidential!!!!”)—pointed out that, since the activities of the Political Intelligence Division were for the most part confidential, the report should not cover the entire activity of the said division.

According to the document, the main purpose of the division was to connect Hungary with “universal European social, cultural, and scientific life” in order to bring about “friendly relations” with the international community. It was to support and assist foreign travelers visiting Hungary—individuals, students, and organized groups. Together with the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, it was to create student and teacher exchanges, support Hungarian exhibitions abroad, establish and reestablish ties between Hungarian and foreign academic and scientific institutions, and distribute official Hungarian government publications and other academic works. The goal of such an undertaking was to create a voice for Hungary. Furthermore, the division was to supply photographs illustrating Hungarian culture and industry to foreign magazines and presses. The last non-confidential activity of the division was to place movies “representing Hungarian life from the correct point of view” in foreign markets. Other sorts of activities listed, crossed out with pencil, included overseeing propaganda organs’ work abroad, contact with foreign Christian groups, fighting against Bolshevik ideology, countering the negative propaganda of the White Terror, and similar counterpropaganda from Hungarian émigré groups that undermined Hungary’s interests.⁹⁹ The document established not only the activities of the division but also the basic tenets of the country’s subsequent cultural-diplomatic efforts.

The KÜM, nominally led by the minister of foreign affairs but actually led by Prime Minister Bethlen, found a willing partner in Klebelsberg. Kuno Klebelsberg was born on November 13, 1873, in Magyarpécska, Transylvania (today Pecica, Romania). His father died when Klebelsberg was only two years old. From an early age he was a thoughtful individual with less-than-impressive physical qualities, which was perhaps one of the reasons that he received a private education. He studied at the Cistercian High School in Székesfehérvár,

⁹⁸ MOL K67, 3. csomó 1. tétel (November 6, 1922).

⁹⁹ MOL K67, 3. csomó 1. tétel (January 11, 1923).

whose alumni included Sándor Wekerle (three-time prime minister of Hungary), Gaszton Gaál (speaker of the National Assembly), János Zichy (former minister of the VKM), and the most influential interwar Hungarian historian, Gyula Szekfű. After his secondary education, he enrolled at the University of Budapest, where he studied politics and law. He also spent time at the University of Berlin and most likely visited the University of Munich and the Sorbonne. During his year at Berlin, he was influenced by economist Adolph Wagner, theologian and church historian Adolf von Harnack, and the overall intellectual legacy of Wilhelm von Humboldt. It was also here in Berlin that he developed a lasting friendship with the former Prussian minister of culture Friedrich Schmidt-Ott and, perhaps most importantly, with Carl Heinrich Becker, who would be the Prussian minister of culture from 1925 to 1930. Upon returning from his studies, Klebelsberg earned his doctorate in state administration (*államtudományok*) and started his career in government service. Moving up within the government service, he filled various posts but mainly remained involved with culture and nationality issues. Between 1913 and 1917, he was a state secretary in the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education. During the Red Terror of Béla Kun, he hid out in the countryside. In 1921 he was briefly the minister of interior. Between 1922 and 1931, he was the minister of religion and public education. During his tenure, culture and education became central to Hungarian political life. He was responsible for the reorganization of the Hungarian educational system on all levels, from kindergarten to university. In addition, he also conducted the country's cultural and sports diplomacy and supported the building of various colleges and sports facilities. He spared no energy in achieving his goal. His ardent workload took its toll. While attending the opening of a public school in the countryside, he developed paratyphoid fever and died on October 12, 1932.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Gábor Ujváry, "*Egy európai formátumú államférfi*": *Klebelsberg Kuno (1875–1932)* (Pécs and Budapest: Kronosz Kiadó and MTT, 2014), 12–31 and *passim*. A comprehensive biography of Klebelsberg has not yet been written. Historian Gábor Ujváry's latest effort is by far the best source by which to understand Klebelsberg and consider his legacy. However, one must note—as Ujváry readily acknowledges—that his work does not fully address Klebelsberg's controversial role and relationship to Hungary's *numerus clausus*; nor does it examine Klebelsberg's anti-Semitism.

Under the careful direction of this duo, the KÜM and the VKM began to forge Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Bethlen and Klebelsberg shared the belief that Hungary had to return to the European community. As Bethlen said, Hungary “must be in harmony” with the rest of Europe, for Hungarians were “not living on an island but are members of a grand family of nations.”¹⁰¹ Bethlen’s quote was very much representative of the anxiety that many felt about Hungary’s isolation—an anxiety that, as the next chapter will show, had historical and cultural roots. One of the immediate goals of Hungarian diplomacy was to avoid becoming an island in the sea of nations. In the process they mobilized the country’s cultural and, in due course, industrial production.

Hungarian efforts were countered by the Little Entente’s determination to secure the peace and the territorial restructuring that accompanied it. They had learned during the war that propaganda worked. Thus Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia remained committed to continuing it. However, this propaganda had to be less confrontational and less overtly propagandistic. Masaryk explained this in his 1927 memoir:

In the psychology of propaganda one point is important—not to imagine that people can be converted to a political idea merely by stating it vigorously and enthusiastically or by harping on its details; the chief thing is to rouse interest in your case as best you can, indirectly no less than directly. Political agitation often frightens or alienates people whom art and literature may attract. Sometimes a single phrase, well used at the right moment is enough.¹⁰²

Hungary’s neighbors continued to utilize previously built relationships as new, and more refined, scholarly publications and political maga-

¹⁰¹ Bethlen, quoted in *Az Est*, May 9, 1922, 3.

¹⁰² Masaryk, quoted in Michael Kunczik, “Forgotten Roots of International Public Relations: Attempts of Germany, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to Influence the United States during World War I,” in *Pathways to Public Relations: Histories of Practice and Profession*, ed. Burton St. John III, Margot Opdycke Lamme, and Jacquie L’Etang (New York: Routledge, 2014), 99.

zines supplemented the time-tested venues of newspaper articles and popular books. The League of Nations' monthly list of selected articles shows a bewildering number of publications that offered expert analysis—from a Czechoslovak and Romanian point of view—on the "Hungarian problem" and the role of the new states in securing European peace and prosperity. Seton-Watson and his colleagues continued to publish on behalf of their wartime allies in the pages of the *Contemporary Review*, *Current History*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Spectator*, *Economist*, and the newly established *Central European Observer*.¹⁰³ The brutality of the White Terror did not help matters, for most Western newspapers condemned it. The *Contemporary Review* published a very critical essay in which it quoted Horthy's alleged order to the "White Terrorists": "The officers' troops summoned on an alarm are under the obligation of proceeding with armed force against the disturbers of the peace at the first command, and to fire a volley upon the crowd at once without the usual warning shots. The shooting must continue implacably without consideration for the number of victims. Use your arms with the consciousness that you see before you not human beings but wild beasts."¹⁰⁴ The quote was from the Viennese Socialist newspaper, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. The fact-finding mission of the British Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain established that indeed there was "political persecution," "suppression" of unions, "anti-Semitism," "massacres, executions, and imprisonments," torture, and detention without trial. However, the delegation also found that the White Terror was "not government-orchestrated or -instigated but rather was the result of the government's inability to control the situation."¹⁰⁵ Whether one accepts the committee conclusion or not—Horthy's personal involvement remains a subject of historical debate—the fact remains that the White Terror tarnished Hungary's foreign image.

¹⁰³ For the list of publications, see Norman S. Field, ed., *League of Nations & United Nations Monthly List of Selected Articles: Political Questions*, vol. 1, 1920–1928 (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications Inc., 1971).

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in "World of Nations: Facts and Documents; The Hungarian White Terror and the Allies," *Contemporary Review* 117 (1920): 713.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe*, 35–36. For a more detailed analysis of the White Terror and its impact, see Bela Bodo, "Hungarian Aristocracy and the White Terror," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (2010): 703–24.

R. W. Seton-Watson's pen continued to work in the pre-1920 fashion: harsh but not unreasonable criticism of Hungary, as opposed to unreserved praise for Czechoslovakia and justification for the Little Entente's actions. The White Terror, the *numerus clausus* act, and the continuous lack of representation of peasants and workers gave critics plenty of ammunition, and the government spent a great deal of time defending itself on the international stage. At a time when Hungary was dependent on securing foreign loans, the international press was far from supportive. Another major publication, the *Economist*, offered this unsympathetic assessment of Horthy's Hungary:

[To] the traveler fresh from Austria, present conditions in Hungary assume the light of sinister contradiction. Whereas in Austria the task of reconstruction is being faced by all sections of the people with common resolution and renewed hope, Hungary, befogged by illusions, bedeviled by suspicions and hatred, is drifting on a tide of warring interests, discontent, and despair. While the problem of Austria was never more than an economic question, over in Hungary, reactionary, irredentist, and potentially dangerous, there might well be erected a sign: "It is useless to throw economic stones at this notice-board." Every question is confused by political issues, each factor in the grave problem which the country presents being obscured by psychological considerations.¹⁰⁶

To what extent one should consider the situation in Austria in the early 1920s as simply an "economic question" is debatable, but the *Economist's* characterization of Hungary as a country "befogged by illusions" was accurate. The elusive dream of revisionism united the otherwise divided country. Hungary's alternatives remained limited by its continuing diplomatic isolation and financial difficulties.

Despite the regime's illiberal nature, the Bethlen government was eventually able to secure international recognition. One might stop here to consider the complexity of the international situation. Despite the clearly anti-liberal and anti-democratic tendencies of the regime,

¹⁰⁶ "The Problem of Hungary. I," *Economist*, October 20, 1923, 597.

most of the Western powers welcomed it, for they preferred its ability to provide some sort of internal stability, not to mention its clear anti-Bolshevik stance. Historian Thomas Lorman explained this best when he concluded that—in regard to the British point of view, but more generally applicable—“the failings of the Bethlen government, its illiberal policies, its grudging acceptance of the peace treaty and its unwillingness to cultivate good relations with its neighbors were all a price worth paying for the economic, social and political stability that were hallmarks of the Bethlen consolidation.”¹⁰⁷ In 1927 the Bethlen government, backed by Italy, stepped out into the international arena. It was the beginning of a new stage in Hungarian diplomatic activities, a period that historian Gyula Juhász aptly termed “active foreign policy,” in which cultural diplomacy played an essential role.

1927: Opening a New Phase

Most historians of Hungarian foreign policy agree that 1927 represented a watershed moment and significantly altered the country's international position. Benito Mussolini, alarmed by ongoing Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations that would impact his plan to establish a strong Italian influence in Southeastern Europe, reached out to the Hungarian leadership and offered cooperation. As Juhász points out, Hungary faced two options. One was to continue negotiations with Yugoslavia, hoping that it would weaken the Little Entente. The other was to halt negotiations and instead move closer to a greater power. Italy, though not a Great Power per se, was certainly not satisfied with the postwar settlements, and as such seemed a perfect partner for the Hungarians. After Klebelsberg laid the groundwork, Bethlen arrived in Rome on April 4, 1927. In his meeting with Mussolini, he explained that Hungarian policy was determined by three factors: the issue of borders, the question of rearmament, and the position of the Little

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Lorman, “‘In Praise of Stability’: British Foreign Office Opinions of the Bethlen Consolidation, 1920–1925,” in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, ed. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004), 151.

Entente. During the visit an Italian-Hungarian peace and friendship treaty was drafted.¹⁰⁸

The next significant moment in Hungary's road from isolation was June 21, 1927. On this day a British newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, published an editorial titled "Hungary's Place in the Sun." Written by Harold Sydney Harmsworth, better known as Viscount Rothermere—media tycoon (owner of the *Daily Mail*), conservative politician, and not least, brother of Lord Northcliffe—it criticized the postwar treaties and pointed out that the Treaty of Trianon was the "most ill advised." He advocated revisions of the frontiers based on ethnic lines, which he argued was the only way to avoid further "conflagration."¹⁰⁹ There has been much speculation about the impetus for Rothermere's article. Some suggested that the viscount was influenced by a lady with Hungarian roots (research shows she was actually an Austro-German). Others pointed to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry as the source of inspiration, while yet others believed that Mussolini was involved. In his memoir Rothermere claimed that he was not solicited in any way by anyone to take on the cause of Hungary.¹¹⁰ We may never learn the motive behind Rothermere's action, but his article sent shock waves through the continent from Paris to Prague. Nowhere was the reverberation greater than in Hungary, where the public welcomed Lord Rothermere as Hungary's champion. Later on, streets were named after him, a memorial fountain was erected in his honor, and there was even talk of putting his son on the vacant Hungarian throne.¹¹¹ Not everyone in Hungary was entirely satisfied with Rothermere's action, including Bethlen. The prime minister had two objections. The first had to do with timing. Bethlen was seeking to establish cordial dip-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 81–85.

¹⁰⁹ Ignác Romsics, "Hungary's Place in the Sun: A British Newspaper Article and its Hungarian Repercussions," in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, ed. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004), 193–94.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 195–97.

¹¹¹ The memorial is known as the Magyar Igazság Kútja (Fountain of Hungarian Justice). The memorial was redesigned after World War II to cover up any suggestion of Rothermere and Hungarian irredentism. Since 2006, it has once again stood in its original form on Budapest's Szabó Ervin Square.

lomatic relations with London and Paris, and the Hungarian public's frenzy over the article undermined his position. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the viscount's suggestion of territorial revision based on ethnic principles was not what Bethlen had in mind. Though government circles never openly articulated it, their goal was to restore historical Hungary's territorial integrity.¹¹² While the media in Prague, Bucharest, and Belgrade reacted with the expected displeasure and their governments used this event as yet another example of Hungarian irredentism, official circles reacted with less zeal. For example, Yugoslav minister of foreign affairs Vojislav Marinković told John Dyneley Prince, American minister to Yugoslavia, the following about Rothermere's action:

I really have nothing to say on the subject. Lord Rothermere is a rich man and the owner of a newspaper, but this has no significance because he has no authority. In fact, he has only attracted attention in Hungary and we already know the attitude of Hungary with respect to this subject which they have now reiterated. The only political circles in Europe which are paying serious attention to Lord Rothermere are certain elements in Hungary, but the Hungarian government itself is behaving very cautiously.¹¹³

The newly established Magyar Revíziós Liga (MRL—Hungarian Revisionist League) had its own reservations. Novelist Ferenc Herczeg, head of the MRL, made this point at the very first meeting of the organization when he said that “the so-called Rothermere-proposal is not representative of Hungary's aims and has not been advanced by Hungarians, as the Hungarian nation will not resign her right to restore its territorial integrity.”¹¹⁴

As part of the new active foreign policy, the government, and Bethlen in particular, altered its official stance on revisionism. Most historians date the official announcement of this new policy to Beth-

¹¹² Romsics, “Hungary's Place in the Sun,” 199–200.

¹¹³ National Archives at College Park, RG 59 Department of State Decimal File 1910–1929 BOX#9782 (#864.014/17).

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Romsics, “Hungary's Place in the Sun,” 200.

len's March 1928 speech in Debrecen, in which he stated that the government's goal was peaceful revisionism—the alteration of existing frontiers. But like most government officials, Bethlen refrained from openly advocating for the restoration of historical borders.¹¹⁵ However, he had already alluded to this in his June 2, 1927, campaign speech in the provincial city of Zalaegerszeg.¹¹⁶ According to the same source, the prime minister's speech reverberated as far as Paris, for *Le Temps* published a report highly critical of it.¹¹⁷ Whatever the exact date, one thing is certain: Hungarian foreign policy changed dramatically.

Stages of Traditional and Cultural Diplomacy, 1927–1941

From 1927, cultural diplomacy was an indispensable component of the new foreign policy. The country had recovered economically and had returned to the international stage, and the Allied Military Commission had departed. Bethlen singlehandedly directed all foreign policy endeavors with a style that was often referred to as “Transylvanian politics.”¹¹⁸ In the tradition of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Transylvanian leaders, who sought to balance between Habsburgs and Ottomans, Bethlen aimed for a balanced approach. In these efforts cultural diplomacy played a significant role. Hungarian revisionists no longer simply wine and dined foreign journalists, intellectuals, and politicians, though they continued the practice. Instead, culture and cultural production, as Klebelsberg understood it, had become a new arsenal in the fight among nations.¹¹⁹ The campaign no longer limited itself to convincing foreign political and intellectual elites. While that audience remained important, practitioners of cultural diplomacy also

¹¹⁵ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919–1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 86.

¹¹⁶ “Győzedelmes politika,” *Zalai Közlöny*, June 2, 1927, 1.

¹¹⁷ “A franciák hét esztendeje,” *Zalai Közlöny*, June 4, 1927, 2.

¹¹⁸ For personal accounts of the diplomatic corps, see Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, *Az ember ősszel visszanéz . . . Egy volt magyar diplomata emlékirataiból*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Európa Kiadó és História, 1996); and György Barcza, *Diplomataemlékeim, 1911–1945*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Európa Kiadó és História, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Klebelsberg, *Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno beszédei*, 542.

targeted mass public opinion through the promotion of tourism and by using the new cultural media of cinema and the radio.

They targeted three groups in this scattershot campaign. Unsurprisingly, the main targets were the Great Powers. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy created small, militarily weak, economically fragile, and politically ineffective countries that relied heavily on the Great Powers. This dependency was especially detrimental to Hungary, which, after losing the war, found itself diplomatically cut off from the rest of the world. Italy and Germany's opposition to the status quo made those countries natural allies and targets of cultural export. Great Britain remained a primary target, not least because of the Hungarian elite's Anglophilia. France was a more difficult country in which to operate, for the Czechoslovaks and Romanians already had great resources in place. The United States was a natural choice. First and foremost, the United States had never ratified the Treaties of Paris. Hungary and the United States signed a separate peace treaty on August 29, 1921, stating, "the United States shall not be bound by the provisions of Part I of that Treaty, nor by any provisions of that Treaty including those mentioned in paragraph (I) of this Article, which relate to the Covenant of the League of Nations, nor shall the United States be bound by any action taken by the League of Nations, or by the Council or by the Assembly thereof, unless the United States shall expressly give its assent to such action."¹²⁰ The next main target was the League of Nations. The reason for targeting the League originated with the Millerand Letter (1920). In this letter, attached to the Treaty of Trianon, French prime minister Alexandre Millerand suggested the possibility of territorial adjustment. This possibility gave some people false hope about the chances of border adjustment. More importantly, as recent research indicates, Articles 8, 10, 11, and 19 of the Covenant of the League of Nations were especially appealing to Hungarians.¹²¹ Article 8 called for the "reduction of national armaments

¹²⁰ World War I Document Archive, *US Peace Treaty with Hungary* (Article II, section 2), http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/US_Peace_Treaty_with_Hungary (accessed December 22, 2011).

¹²¹ Miklós Zeidler, "A Nemzetek Szövetsége a magyar külpolitikai gondolkodásban," in *Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 160–61.

to the lowest point consistent with national safety,” which Hungary, facing its neighboring countries’ overwhelming forces, saw as a point of support. Article 10 guaranteed the member states’ “territorial integrity and existing political independence,” which once again, because of the weak state of the Hungarian armed forces (limited to 35,000), was an important provision. Article 11 allowed nations to bring forward any issue that they deemed to be “affecting international relations which threaten[s] to disturb international peace or the good understanding between nations upon which peace depends.” Finally, and most importantly to Hungarians, Article 19 stated that “the Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world.”¹²² The last article contributed to the idea that Hungary might be able to revise the treaty through the League of Nations. The third target group included less prominent countries from Argentina to Estonia, and everywhere in between. This had much to do with the ideal of the League of Nations in which all nations, regardless of their size, were represented and, in theory, were able to voice their opinion.

The strategy of appealing to nations far and wide remained a constant feature of Hungarian cultural diplomacy under the premiership of Gyula Gömbös (1932–1936). The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis changed the political climate in Germany, and this change reverberated beyond German borders. Although Hungary moved toward the Rome-Berlin Axis and signed commercial treaties with Germany, the new relationship was not without problems. Berlin made it clear from the beginning that it would not support Hungarian revisionist goals against Romania. In addition, there was increasing pressure from Germany to secure special privileges for Hungary’s German minority. Consequently, the KÜM, under the direction of Kálmán Kánya, sought to maintain cordial relations with all great and lesser powers, including neighboring countries, and in 1934 established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

¹²² Avalon Project, *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp (accessed December 22, 2011).

Under Kálmán Darányi's government (1936–1938), Hungary continued trying to renew ties with other Western powers, especially Great Britain, to free itself from Germany's economic and political influence. By 1937 there was an effort to create a regional status quo when the Little Entente and Hungarian representatives joined at Lake Bled to discuss the possibility of Hungarian rearmament—a program that the government had already launched. However, in light of Germany's ascendance, there was growing domestic pressure to align more closely with Hitler's Germany.

After the March 1938 *Anschluss*, the new government, led by Béla Imrédy, indeed forged stronger ties with Berlin. Imrédy's pro-German and right-wing sentiment was well-known. He was appointed to calm right-wing anxieties. Under his short-lived rule, the Hungarian National Assembly passed the country's official First Anti-Jewish Law. Despite earlier assertions by some Hungarian historians, by now it is clear that Act XV of 1938, passed on May 29, resulted not from German pressure but rather from indigenous Hungarian efforts. The law curtailed the proportion of Jews, defined by religion, in some professional fields and public service to 20 percent.

The real turning point in traditional diplomacy came in the fall of 1938. The Munich Agreement sent shockwaves through East Central Europe.¹²³ Historian Mária Ormos is most likely right when she states that “the combination of German superiority and the Western democracies' weakness was probably what convinced Imrédy that democracy was more senile and weakened than he had presumed.”¹²⁴ Hungary's political leadership saw an opportunity to realize its dream of territorial revision. Imrédy and company feared that by not aligning with Berlin's political demands, Hungary might lose out. To avoid such a fate, Imrédy, despite some objections, sent a delegation to Hitler. Hitler warned the Hungarians that they would receive minimal border adjustments if they did not draw closer to the Rome-Berlin Axis. He also

¹²³ For an excellent study on this, see Magda Ádám, “A versailles-i Közép-Európa összeomlása—A müncheni válság és Magyarország,” *Századok* 113, no. 4 (1999): 685–724.

¹²⁴ Mária Ormos, *Hungary in the Age of Two World Wars, 1914–1945*, trans. Brian McLean (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 2007. Distributed by Columbia University Press), 296.

made references to Hungary's continued membership in the League of Nations and raised questions about Hungary's joining the Anti-Comintern Pact.¹²⁵

Many, though not all, of the Hungarian demands were satisfied by the First Vienna Award on November 2, 1938. The country received approximately 4,605 square miles with a little over one million inhabitants, the majority ethnic Hungarians.¹²⁶ Very few people in Hungary knew, or cared to know, that the price of this territorial reacquisition was further political and economic concessions to Germany. At the same time, Hungarian cultural diplomacy continued its work, albeit with a different focus: the new goal was to secure worldwide recognition for the territorial gains.

The radicalization of Imrédy's government revitalized the conservative opposition and paved the way for Teleki's second tenure as prime minister. Paradoxically, Imrédy's own anti-Semitism forced his resignation, as someone revealed that his great-grandfather was Jewish. Even with Imrédy out of the picture, the influence of the right wing grew. In the spring 1939 elections, the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party secured 900,000 votes and won over forty seats in Parliament, essentially becoming the second power in politics.¹²⁷ Teleki, himself an anti-Semite, supported the Second Anti-Jewish Law (Act IV of 1939), which reduced the proportion of Jews in professional and public sectors to 6 percent. Despite some arguments to the contrary, recent historical works clearly establish that the law was not due to German pressure; rather, it was passed because of domestic anti-Semitism and greed.

Teleki embarked on what contemporaries at home and abroad referred to as "tightrope politics." His policy sought to satisfy his, and Hungarians', unrelenting desire for further territorial revision, for which he realized Germany's support was crucial. On the other hand, he recognized that if war broke out, a German victory was not a foregone con-

¹²⁵ Ibid., 297.

¹²⁶ According to the 1941 Hungarian census, ethnic Hungarians made up 84 percent of the population in this area. According to the 1930 Czechoslovak census, ethnic Hungarians made up 57 percent of the region's population. See Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 246.

¹²⁷ Gyula Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919–1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 158.

clusion. Thus he sought to keep Hungary out of war and to retain the country's ability to make independent foreign policy decisions.

There was a price for German support. Only two days after Teleki formed his new government, Hungary joined the Anti-Comintern Pact. As result, the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic ties. As an independent Slovakia was proclaimed, with Germany's tacit support, Hungarian troops occupied Subcarpathia (also known as Carpatho-Ukraine). On April 11, 1939, Hungary withdrew its membership from the League of Nations. The unexpected news of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August made clear to Teleki that Poland—targeted by Germany but protected by British and French guarantees—might be the flashpoint for the new war. Citing national honor, his government, with Horthy's support, refused to participate in the attack or to allow German troops to use Hungarian railways, and actually provided sanctuary for Polish refugees. As Ormos explains, "despite the pro-Axis statements . . . Hungarian-German relations were clearly bad in the autumn and winter of 1939."¹²⁸

Refusing German favors was representative of Teleki's second goal, to remain neutral in the war, for he correctly understood that Germany's attack on Poland would bring Great Britain, France, and possibly even the United States into the action. Teleki sought to ensure that Hungary would not get involved in a war with any of the Great Powers. He recognized that neutrality would gain favors for Hungary after the war. Hungarian cultural-diplomatic efforts were redoubled in France, Great Britain, and the United States. In March 1940, Teleki authorized preliminary work for the organization of a government-in-exile in the United States. Based on the experience of World War I, the prime minister wanted to make sure that Hungarian interests would be represented abroad even under German occupation, since he believed Western victory was inevitable. The success of the German blitzkrieg changed his mind. According to his biographer, historian Balázs Ablonczy, Teleki was especially distraught by the fate of the small Western and Northern European countries of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands. His faith in an Allied victory waned. Accordingly, he ordered the return of the five million dollars

¹²⁸ Ormos, *Hungary in the Age of Two World Wars*, 354–55.

that was sent to the Hungarian minister in Washington, János Pelényi, to establish a government-in-exile.¹²⁹ Even as he continued his efforts to maintain neutrality and Western goodwill, the country once again moved closer to Nazi Germany, which was now seen as the likely victor in the war. When the Soviet Union began pressuring Romania for territories in Bukovina and Bessarabia, Hungary turned to Berlin to guarantee its share.

The Second Vienna Award of August 1940 granted Northern Transylvania to Hungary. In exchange for German arbitration, Teleki agreed to recognize the *Volksbund* as a privileged party exclusively representing Hungary's German minority. In addition, the government agreed to supply Germany with food and raw materials beyond the requirements agreed upon in the joint economic deal signed in 1935. Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross, was pardoned and released from prison. Finally, Hungary joined the Tri-Power Pact (or Tripartite Pact) in November 1940.¹³⁰ Less than a week later, both Romania and Slovakia followed. Nobody wanted to be at a disadvantage in the competition for Hitler's goodwill. An unforeseen consequence was the negative international reaction to the Second Vienna Award. Great Britain refused to recognize the decision as valid, although it stated that new border arrangements would be necessary after the war. The United States was also critical but showed some degree of sympathy.¹³¹

Teleki's cultural-diplomatic machinery set out to legitimize these territorial gains in the eyes of international public opinion. However, there was very little room for Hungary to maneuver. German troops were stationed in Romania and Slovakia. In addition, Hungary shared a border with the Third Reich after the *Anschluss*. The prime minister learned through unofficial channels that a German attack on the Soviet Union was only a question of time. Once again he reconsidered foreign policy aims. He sought to sign a non-aggression pact with Moscow, which, in the face of Horthy's opposition, was essentially

¹²⁹ Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874–1941): The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician*, trans. Thomas J. and Helen D. DeKornfeld (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 2006), 207–8.

¹³⁰ Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 175–76.

¹³¹ Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki*, 215.

reduced to a trade agreement. As a gesture of good faith and a channel to the world, the Teleki government approached Yugoslavia and, in December 1940, signed a treaty guaranteeing permanent peace and eternal friendship between the two countries. At the same time, relations between Yugoslavia and Germany deteriorated. It was obvious to all that a German attack would come sooner rather than later. Teleki recognized that Hungary would not be able to refuse Germany again. It would ultimately mean that Hungary would be fighting on the side of Germany against the West and the Soviet Union. For Teleki, this was an unwinnable war.¹³²

In the face of this unsolvable situation, Teleki—clinically depressed due to personal and professional problems—committed suicide on April 2, 1941. His letter to Horthy, a de facto suicide note, is worth quoting in its entirety:

Excellency,

We have become word-breakers—out of cowardice—and broke our promise of the eternal friendship agreement based on your Mohács speech. The nation senses that we have cast away its honor. We have sided with the villains because of the atrocities they reported, which are a pack of lies. There were none against Hungarians and none even against Germans! We will be robbing a corpse. We will be the most miserable of nations. I did not hold you back. I am guilty.¹³³

Conclusion

With Teleki's death, the last link to the West was gone, for despite his anti-Semitic policies and firm revisionist attitude, Teleki was greatly respected in the Western world. Teleki's death was not able to arrest the country's tragic decline. The new government led by László Bárdossy made a last-ditch effort to save face. It stated that Hungary

¹³² Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 179–81.

¹³³ In his second letter to Horthy, he stated that, in the event of his survival, he was resigning as prime minister. The letter is quoted and translated in Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki*, 231–32.

would join the impending German action against Yugoslavia only if and when Yugoslavia as a political entity ceased to exist. This did not fool anyone. Indeed, before April 11, 1941, as Hungarian troops crossed into the former Yugoslav territories, Great Britain had already severed diplomatic relations with Hungary. In his communiqué to the Hungarian minister in London, British foreign secretary of state for war Anthony Eden left little doubt about the position of his government:

His Majesty's Government was until quite lately trying to understand the undoubtedly difficult position your Government has found themselves in both externally and internally. We have shown more than one sign of this understanding. But now you have handed over your country to the opponent of England and have, almost simultaneously, attacked the country with which only a few months ago you concluded a pact of friendship. This will remain an everlasting shame upon the reputation of Hungary. If a country is no longer master of her fate and voluntarily resigns her independence, then at least she should not sign a pact of friendship which she then breaks. Tell it at home that England will remember that when peace will be made . . . Teleki was the last man in whom we had confidence. We shall have no more dealing with those who are now in power.¹³⁴

Hungary rapidly moved toward disaster. On June 26, 1941, Hungary declared that it considered itself at war with the Soviet Union (without an official declaration). On August 8, Hungary passed its Third Anti-Jewish Law prohibiting marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. On December 6, Great Britain declared war on Hungary. On December 12, Hungary declared war on the United States. Hungarian cultural diplomacy had finally lost its *raison d'être*.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 186.

Chapter 2

Defining the Nation

“Ferry-land, ferry-land, ferry-land . . . even in its most daring dreams it is only roaming back and fro between two shores. From East to West or, rather, the other way around.”

— *Endre Ady*, 1905¹

Mi a magyar? (What is Hungarian?) was one of the most divisive questions in interwar Hungary. It was one that a myriad of intellectuals, public figures, and even politicians sought to answer. Because Hungarian cultural diplomacy’s main aim was to construct and project a positive image of the country abroad, it relied heavily on a process in which the political and intellectual elite sought to delineate the essence of Hungarianness. What should Hungary’s preferred image be? What message should it convey? While there was near-universal agreement on the need for a new image, the various factions offered very different understandings of the past and the present, just as they failed to agree on the fundamental building blocks of the Hungarian national character.

The matter of competing, and often contradictory, visions of Hungarianness was further complicated by anxieties about the country’s

¹ Endre Ady, “Morituri,” *Figyelő* 1–2 (1905): 633–35. Translated by György Péteri in *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. György Péteri (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 1.

relationship to Europe. The almost obsessive questioning of European-ness was a peculiarly East and East-Central European phenomenon. It amounted to an atmosphere, as Bibó explained, in which small states of Eastern Europe shared a belief in a real need to justify their right to exist.² This mentality, one could argue, was rooted in historical experience. For centuries, inhabitants of this region indeed fought to survive first Mongol, then Ottoman assault, only to fall under Habsburg rule. In the aftermath of World War I, some, like the Romanians and Czechoslovaks, benefited greatly from the peace and sought to justify their territorial gains. Others, like the Hungarians, felt betrayed by territorial losses and looked for a remedy. Regardless of their different aims, all of the region's small nations sought justification and assurance abroad. That is why the new or newly reconstructed nation-states were only theoretically free to construct their identities and the images of those identities. Of course, all national identity is constructed vis-à-vis another; thus it can be argued that no nation is entirely free to construct its identity. However, I would argue that powerful nations and less powerful nations differ in the degree to which their identity construction is influenced by others. In the case of Hungary and its neighbors, because of their dependency on the larger and stronger states, and international public opinion in general, they were forced to pay attention to what kinds of identities and images they were constructing and in what ways those images were propagated. Disagreements about the identifying elements of national character made the building of an effective cultural diplomacy—already a daunting task—ever more difficult.

This chapter cannot and will not offer a comprehensive picture of Hungarian national identity construction. In this chapter I only want to provide the necessary background information that is indispensable for understanding what comes next. Ever since Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities*, we have understood that national identities are constructs constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.³ The first part of the chapter examines the construction and negotiation of prewar Hungarian national identity, with special emphasis on

² Bibó, *Harmadik út*, 131–32 and 137.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

the changing understanding of Hungarianness and the country's relationship to the Habsburg Monarchy. The second part of the chapter situates the post-1918 Hungarian cultural and identity crisis within the larger analytical framework of regional and continental crises of a similar nature. The next section offers a short overview of *nemzetkarakterológia*, a discussion of national characteristics that created its own cottage industry in interwar Hungary. The last part of the chapter, with the aid of János Gyurgyák and Balázs Trencsényi's recent studies, presents four different visions of Hungarianness. These are not monolithic or monochrome visions. There are crossovers, shared likes and dislikes, and less-than-defined boundaries. Nevertheless, based on their ideologies, their historical memories, their views on modernity vis-à-vis tradition, and their stand on the question of Europeaness, one can distinguish between 1) radical liberals—later *urbánusok*; 2) *fajvédők* (race defenders); 3) *népiek* (generally mistranslated as “populists”); and 4) conservative national liberals.⁴

National Identity before the Nation-State?

Before the nineteenth century, there were three different definitions of the term “Hungarian.” These definitions were used interchangeably depending on what was to be emphasized. According to historian Jenő Szűcs, the first classification included all of those living in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (*regnum Hungariae*). The second included all those who belonged to the same linguistic and cultural group (*lingua et moribus*). The third type, and the most privileged one, included those who belonged to the social order of the nobility (*natio Hungarica*).⁵ Thus, before the nineteenth century we cannot talk about the existence of one single national identity, because there was no definitive national consciousness, let alone a nation-state. For example, in order to be part

⁴ János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok: a magyar nemzeteszmé és nacionalizmus története* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2007); and Balázs Trencsényi, *A nép lelke. Nemzetkarakterológiai viták Kelet-Európában* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2011).

⁵ Jenő Szűcs, *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó-JATE-Osiris, 1997), 337.

of the privileged group of the *natio Hungarica* (about 5 percent of the total population), knowledge of Hungarian was not a requirement.

It was the enlightened absolutism of Maria Theresa and, more importantly, that of her son Joseph II that ignited the development of Hungarian nationalism in its modern sense. The period was highlighted by the struggle between an ever-changing *natio Hungarica* aiming to safeguard its privileges and a Habsburg regime aiming to curtail them. One of the cornerstones of this early nationalist sentiment was the role of the Hungarian language. The likes of György Bessenyei, himself ironically enough a member of the noble guard of Maria Theresa, called for cultural reforms. One of the key demands was the primacy of the Hungarian language instead of Latin, the language of administration, and German, which was to be the *lingua franca* of the entire Habsburg dominion. In his 1802 essay, Bessenyei, addressing the nobility, argued: "It is time, dear Sirs, for the mind of the Hungarian Nation to be clarified in her mother-tongue regarding its objects!" In the spirit of the Enlightenment, of which he was a product, he further argued that Hungarian translations of Latin, Greek, French, and German works were necessary in order to refine the nation. To Bessenyei, being Hungarian meant speaking, reading, and writing in Hungarian, for he believed that "whoever elevates the language of his homeland brings the esteem of his Nation into a luminous light."⁶ During the 1820s and 1830s, under the leadership of Ferenc Kazinczy, the Hungarian language underwent major modernizing reforms in order to raise the nation's cultural output to the European level while using the Hungarian vernacular.

It was during this period that we can begin to speak of the emergence of a modern national consciousness in Hungary, albeit one without an existing independent nation-state. At the forefront of the movement was the nobility—more specifically the lesser nobility, which, while often translated as such, was not the same as the gentry. The emerging national sentiment left its mark on the development

⁶ György Bessenyei, "Beszéd az országnak tárgyárul," trans. Dávid Oláh, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 1, ed. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 152–54.

of Hungarian culture. It marked the maturity of Hungary's national romanticism in literature with such figures as Mihály Vörösmarty and Ferenc Kölcsey. Some argue that this was the time period when a "dominating trend in Hungarian literary and art criticism" originated. According to this "trend," literature and art was seen as a "service to the nation."⁷

One of the aims adopted by Romantic poets was the literary representation of Hungarian history in binary opposition to Habsburg Austria. Vörösmarty, in his 1825 *Zalán futása* (The Flight of Zalán), recalled Hungary's ancient past, when the Magyar tribes arrived in the Carpathian Basin. The heroic poem tells the story of a series of battles in which the Magyar tribes led by Árpád (and his lieutenant Ete) defeated the tribes of Zalán and thus gained rights to the land. It not only celebrated the country's Eastern origin but also emphasized the heroic bravery of the Magyar fighters (as well as including a love story between Ete and Hajna) and offered a historical justification for the existence of an independent and strong Hungary. In many ways *Zalán futása* was also designed as a call to arms, as the first lines indicate: "Where are you, glory of old? Lost deep in the night of shadows?"⁸

The figure of Árpád, closely linked in myth and tradition with Attila the Hun, became especially popular among Hungary's Protestant nobility, who used this origin myth to further distinguish themselves from the Catholics.⁹ Their more recent heroes were the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *kuruc* fighters (anti-Habsburg paramilitary, mainly Protestant, forces) in direct opposition to the *labanc* (Austrian and Habsburg loyalist, mainly Catholic, forces). Although the confessional differences became less pronounced, the *kuruc*-versus-*labanc*

⁷ George Barany, "Hungary: From Aristocratic to Proletarian Nationalism," in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969), 265.

⁸ Mihály Vörösmarty, "Zalán futása," trans. Watson Kirkconnell and Adam Makkai, in *In Quest of the Miracle Stag: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago and Budapest: Atlantis-Centaur; M. Szivárvány; Corvina, 1996), 214.

⁹ Jenő Szűcs, *Nemzet és történelem: tanulmányok* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974), 415–20; and Katalin Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István," in *Hungarians between "East" and "West": Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 15.

mental construct, and its conflict, reverberated deep into the twentieth century.

Opposite the figure of Árpád stood the tradition that venerated the role of Saint Stephen (*Szent István*), Hungary's first Christian king (ruled 1000–1038). This story celebrated Hungary's connection with the West. According to this founding myth, Hungary was offered up to the Virgin Mary by Saint Stephen, and since then it has been *Regnum Marianum*—the land of Mary. It was under her protection that Hungary became the shield of Christendom against the Mongols and Ottomans and the bulwark of the Catholic faith. Stephen and his descendants Imre and László were all canonized, making an everlasting connection to Western Christianity, and, more importantly, the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, the House of Habsburg, in the face of growing Protestant influence, encouraged and even promoted the legends of the Hungarian saints and the worship of Mary. However, to the Hungarians it was more than being part of the Catholic universe; their myth was also used as a justification for autonomy within the Habsburg Empire.¹⁰

The duality of national self-identification also had a significant impact on domestic policies, as was best illuminated by the conflicting relationship between nineteenth-century Hungary's two greatest figures: Lajos Kossuth and István Széchenyi. Kossuth, coming from a Lutheran lesser-nobility family and educated in a Calvinist college, envisioned an independent Hungary. In his vision the ethnic Magyar nationality would enjoy privileges, regardless of social standing, above the non-Magyar nationalities of the Hungarian realm, who in turn were to be Magyarized. On the other hand, there was Széchenyi, a member of an old and prominent Catholic noble family, who favored gradual change, emphasized the promotion of education, and opposed Magyarization. He believed in the idea of a political nation, albeit under Magyar leadership. During the 1848–1849 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, Kossuth's vision dominated.¹¹ Consequently,

¹⁰ Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István," 12–14.

¹¹ It must be noted that Kossuth, while in exile, radically modified his vision of Hungary, and by the 1860s he was promoting the idea of a federalized Hungary. It was a plan that became the intellectual framework for Oszkár Jászi's Danubian Confederation five decades later.

although Hungary gained independence, it was short-lived. The joint forces of the Austrian army, the agitated non-Magyar nationalities, and the Russian forces of Nicholas I eventually put down the Hungarian uprising.

After a short hiatus between 1849 and the 1867 *Ausgleich* during which Hungarians practiced passive resistance against Habsburg rule, the Hungarian national identity question resurfaced once again. The underlying questions remained the same. The debate continued to address the issue of a political versus ethnic nation and the country's relationship to the Habsburg monarchy. According to ethnographer Tamás Hofer, there were three kinds of self-identification based on competing loyalties: loyalty to the Dual Empire of Austria-Hungary, loyalty to the idea of a multiethnic Kingdom of Hungary, and loyalty to Hungary as a home of ethnic Hungarians, who made up just over half of the kingdom's population.¹² All three groups actively shaped national identity through the production of national culture. The first level of understanding was articulated in public buildings such as railway stations and theaters, which were more or less similar throughout the empire and emerged as products of the modernization drive within the Dual Monarchy.¹³ Those who promoted a multiethnic political state believed in an inclusionary vision of Hungarianness whereby all ethnicities living in the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy were members of the nation. These liberals aimed to extend privileges and rights to all as they articulated the image of a unified multiethnic Hungary. Hofer's study illustrates that in this "imagined community," folk culture played a pivotal role, not least because the majority of non-Magyar (and Magyar) nationalities were peasants. Intellectuals, such as the members of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, aimed to promote ethnic folk traditions. To this end they created separate sections to study Serb, Slovak, Romanian, and German folk culture. Literary figures from Mór Jókai to Kálmán Mikszáth often found their subject matter in non-Magyar settings and

¹² Tamás Hofer, "Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity," in *Hungarians between "East" and "West": Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 35.

¹³ Ibid.

wrote of them in a positive light.¹⁴ By the 1890s this group had lost momentum and influence, and those with the vision of a “Hungary of Magyars” came to prominence. Their exclusionary policies led to the curtailment of the rights and privileges of non-Magyar nationalities. It was the period when, according to Hofer, Hungarian folk culture became implicitly Magyar, promoting the idea of a historically fixed, ancient Hungarian “essence” that was to be “guarded and kept pure.” This understanding promoted the Oriental traits of Hungarian culture as invented tradition and heritage in ways that argued for the uniqueness of the Hungarian “folk soul.”¹⁵ This folk national soul was rooted in the vast Eastern steppes in the areas around the Volga River, where, according to contemporary literary historian and novelist Zsolt Beöthy’s 1896 argument, the iconic symbol of Hungarianness, the warrior horseman, was born. In his interpretation it was the Magyar race’s superiority, thanks to the Hungarians’ ancient Oriental traits, that made it the only ethnic group in the region with the qualities and the drive to form a nation. He defined “Hungarian race” as an end product of its historical past, not in a biological sense. Beöthy declared that through historical development, the Magyars were able to assimilate others and “shape” them to their “own likeness” while maintaining a kind of original Magyar “spirit.” As he put it: “Thus the nature of the Hungarian soil, the dominion of the Hungarian race with its public institutions, the character of Hungarian history, the Hungarian language . . . all these, despite the unceasing intensive mingling of races, have sustained, at least in its main features, the original Hungarian spirit.”¹⁶ At the same time, one can see the appearance of the vision of “Hungarian liberal imperialism.” The main ideologue of this vision, argues Balázs Trencsényi, was Béni Kállay. According to Kállay’s understanding, Hungary, as a nation situated on the border of East and West, had the special ability to understand the Eastern men-

¹⁴ Ibid., 37–38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶ Zsolt Beöthy, “A magyar irodalom kis-tükre,” trans. Dávid Oláh, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 3/1, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 29–32.

tality and, as such, could serve as a conduit between the two. This sort of “civilizing mission” remained one of the main pillars of Hungarian self-assessment for years to come.¹⁷

By the turn of the century, competing visions of Hungary and Hungarianness were part of the political discourse. The experience of World War I, revolution, counter-revolution, and the subsequent peace treaty further polarized the construction of Hungarian national identity and its imagery. Furthermore, and more importantly, in the aftermath of World War I, the debate about Hungarian national character intensified. However, the parameters of the debate changed significantly, and as Trencsényi illustrates, some elements of the shared Habsburg past actually gained new currency with the national discourse.¹⁸ The issue of defining Hungarians in terms of ethnic/religious vis-à-vis political understanding also lost its relevance in a relatively homogenous Hungarian nation-state, with one very notable exception—the Hungarian Jewish population. The main debate during the postwar years was about specific Hungarian characteristics; it aimed to negotiate the balance of modernity and tradition and pondered the meaning and importance of Europeaness. Although some of the discussions had roots in the country’s past, this debate was also part of a wider regional and continental cultural crisis that was one of the unforeseen results of the war.

Post-World War I Crisis of Culture

World War I left more than physical devastation in its wake. The experience of war also led to a cultural and intellectual crisis. Intellectuals and artists struggled to make sense of their new reality. This new reality was a nexus of the new and the old. On the one hand, the world was rapidly transforming through technology. The distances between people were shrinking thanks to discoveries and inventions in communication and transportation. On the other hand, many questioned the direction in which humanity was moving and began to question the future of Western civilization. The “lost generation,” as Gertrude Stein referred

¹⁷ Trencsényi, *A nép lelke*, 340–43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

to it, which included the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, and Erich Maria Remarque, reacted to their new reality with considerable disillusionment and rebellion. Novelist Robert Briffault, in his *Europa in Limbo*, described the postwar perplexity:

It looked much the same a few days before ten million men went to the shambles of war. Europe seems—to the external eye—to be still standing, much the same, after the blast and shambles, does it not? But is it? In reality, not one building-stone of it, of the essential core and foundation of it, is left standing! Every one of its values, the animating sparks of meaning without which no building-stone and no life can stand—every one is fallen and lies level with the ground.¹⁹

German historian Felix Gilbert—who came of age as the Wilhelmine Empire crumbled, and as, in the midst of civil strife and revolution, the Weimar Republic was born—voiced similar feelings. He recalled the interwar years and wrote: “The only certainty we had was that nothing was certain.”²⁰ Others also painted a very dark picture of the future of humanity, no one more so than Sigmund Freud. In his 1929 *Civilization and its Discontents*, he wrote: “Men are not gentle creatures, who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowment is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness . . . *Homo homini lupus*.”²¹ During the 1920s, argues historian Jan Ifversen, “Europe’s predicament was regarded not solely in political, economic or military terms, but as something that touched the very heart of European life. Often it was referred to as a crisis of civilization.”²² Indeed, most historians would agree that one of the consequences of the war was the

¹⁹ Robert Briffault, *Europa in Limbo* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), 474.

²⁰ Quoted in Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 363.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1995), 749.

²² Jan Ifversen, “The Crisis of European Civilization after 1918,” in *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The Legacy of the First World War*, ed. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 14.

amplification of the debate focusing on the deep-seated questions about the meaning and consequences of modernity vis-à-vis tradition.²³

In Weimar Germany, for example, according to historian Eric Weitz, culture and politics were characterized by “the restless questioning of what it means to live in modern times, the search of new forms of expressions suitable to the cacophony of modern life, and the belief in the possibilities of the future.”²⁴ Others, as Jeffrey Herf points out, focused their attention on the perceived conflict between advancing technology and the traditions of German nationalism, which was exaggerated by political reality. As he puts it, “the battle between *Technik* and *Kultur* took place against the background of military defeat, failed revolutions, successful counterrevolution, a divided Left, an embittered and resentful Right.”²⁵ Peter Gay would argue that the crisis was about the dual character of the Weimar Republic, namely that it was “both old and new.”²⁶ The question of Germanness divided the already fractured society even further. What is German? What art is German? Is cosmopolitan Berlin representative of the German essence? Or is it the Franconian village? Despite political and cultural penchants, “all of Weimar’s protagonists grappled with this tension-bound world of modernity.”²⁷

²³ I use these terms in the widest possible sense. I refer to modernity as a cultural and ideological phenomenon in opposition to traditional cultural and ideological values. For a short but useful discussion of the question of modernism, modernity, and modernization, see Maria Todorova, “Modernism,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. 3/1, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny, and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 4–25.

²⁴ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 253.

²⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18. According to Herf, it would be the Nazis who “bridged” this gap between technological modernity and traditional German culture. Similar discussions were also taking place in interwar Japan; see Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁶ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), 2.

²⁷ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 4.

Other countries, despite the fact that they were on the victors' side, experienced a similarly tumultuous time. Italy found itself after the war in the unenviable position of being the "least of the great powers."²⁸ The problem was, argues sociologist Mabel Berezin, that in 1922, as Mussolini gained power, "Italy remained a state without a nation."²⁹ The debate pitting modernity against tradition was further complicated by the Italian Fascists' drive to create the new Italian man. The concept of *bonifica*, or reclamation, became the centerpiece of the Fascist regime's campaign to "combat degeneration and radically renew Italian society by 'pulling up bad weeds and cleaning up the soil.'"³⁰ Berezin shows that the Fascist project "aimed to create new men and women, a new ethos, a new culture . . . the regime sought to forge new identities."³¹ Giovanni Gentile, who, according to Victoria de Grazia, was the personification of Fascism's ideal of culture, envisioned the renewal of Italy's cultural life "by means of a dynamic new synthesis of the national heritage and fascist ideology."³² Bringing together Italy's ancient past, the triumphs of the Renaissance, and the futuristic vision of Fascism was further complicated by the question of Europe. In 1934, the young art critic Renato Poggioli asked his peers: "Should we Italians become more European, or should Europe become more Italian? . . . Are we merely an eccentric peninsula on the continent, or are we still and always the garden of the Empire? To defend ourselves spiritually, should our culture turn its back on Europe, or should we be open to that which comes from outside?"³³

It was interwar East and East-Central Europe that experienced the postwar cultural crisis to its fullest extent in a very peculiar form. With the end of empires, physical borders were not the only boundaries that had changed. The newly constructed or reconstructed countries of the region were facing the challenge of creating their own, independent,

²⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 5–6.

²⁹ Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 42.

³⁰ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 4.

³¹ Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, 4–5.

³² Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 187–88.

³³ Quoted in Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 1.

national characteristics. Before the war, they were able to define themselves in opposition to their Austrian (or Austro-Hungarian), Russian, German, or Ottoman overlords. The end of the war changed all that. Polish novelist Witold Gombrowicz's diary entry is a testament to this problem. He wrote: "After our struggles with Russia, with Germany, a struggle with Poland awaited us. It is not surprising, therefore, that independence turned out to be more burdensome and humiliating than bondage. As long as we were absorbed with the revolt against a foreign power, questions such as 'Who are we?' 'What are we to make ourselves?' lie dormant, but independence awakened the riddle that was slumbering with us."³⁴ With jubilation over independence also came anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Cultural crisis—combined with economic and political troubles—led to a crisis of national identity, for they saw a positive and unified national character as the basic foundation of their policies that aimed to either maintain or challenge the postwar status quo.

Romania, for example, achieved its territorial aspirations. However, Romanians also experienced an unforeseen consequence from these territorial gains: the question of national unity arose. As a result, the idea of "national character" generated heated debate in interwar Romania as well. As Katherine Verdery points out, it was a discussion about *specificul național*, which literally translates as "the nationally specific" or "the national specificity."³⁵ While the discussion was not entirely new, it was radically intensified because of the presence of Hungarian, German, and Ukrainian minorities in postwar Romania. As historian Irina Livezeanu puts it, the postwar territorial settlement was an "embarrassment of riches" and an "ambiguous and difficult gift." Like a "Trojan horse," continues Livezeanu, "it brought apparent and momentary glory but concealed untold social, demographic,

³⁴ Quoted in Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski's Poland, 1926–1935* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), viii.

³⁵ Katherine Verdery, "National Ideology and National Character in Interwar Romania," in *National Character and Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 103. See also Trencsényi, *A nép lelke*, 86–298.

political, and cultural challenges.”³⁶ In addition, Romania, like most of its regional counterparts, was heavily dependent on the West in the political, economic, and military arenas. The country’s intellectual and cultural elite was deeply divided between two camps: the “Europeanists” or “Westernizers” and the traditionalists. The “Europeanists” promoted the continuation of Romania’s development based on the Western European model. They argued that Romania’s disposition was Occidental rather than Oriental and emphasized progress in science.³⁷ To them the national character was rooted in the cities. Consequently, they promoted the ongoing internationalization of Romanian culture and intellectual life. On the other side of the equation were the traditionalists, “those intellectuals who sought models for Romanian development in its autochthonous past, real or imagined.”³⁸ Even though the traditionalist camp was far from united, they all agreed on the unique and predominantly rural character of Romania. Moreover, generally speaking, they all feared the continuation of “cultural imports,” cosmopolitanism, and the “craze” for everything that was French. Leading historian and prominent political figure Nicolae Iorga bitterly complained about the condition of Romanian affairs and said that while Romanians had a national state, they lacked national culture.³⁹

The postwar cultural crisis led to an especially problematic discussion about national character in Hungary. It was a country that, much like Germany, had been defeated in the war and experienced Bolshevik revolt and counter-revolution. However, it was also a country, unlike Germany and more like Romania, that was dependent on others because it lacked its own military, economic, and political power. It was a nearly homogeneous country due to a traumatic territorial loss. As a result of the postwar settlement, Hungary became a small and weak

³⁶ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 7.

³⁷ For more on interwar Romania and science, see Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

³⁸ Keith Hitchins, “*Gîndirea*: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise,” in *Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940*, ed. Kenneth Jowitt (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

country with dreams of greatness and stature. These circumstances forced Hungarians to search for an identity that would reflect their national aspirations.

Hungarian Nemzetkarakterológia

Interwar Hungarian *nemzetkarakterológia* had multiple functions: to explain past failures, to assist in the understanding of the present, and to aid in the betterment of the future. The discussion of national character produced enough works to fill a small library. I selected three I believe illustrate the sentiments surrounding this matter.

The first work is Gyula Szekfű's 1920 *Three Generations: History of a Declining Age* (*Három nemzedék—Egy hanyatló kor története*). Szekfű was undoubtedly the most important figure of the conservative national liberals. He was one of the early Hungarian practitioners of the German *Geistesgeschichte* School (*szellemtörténet* or *szellemi történelem* in Hungarian).⁴⁰ Inspired by the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch, Heinrich Rickert, and Eduard Spranger, among others, his historical analysis focused on the role of the psychological and historical development of the human soul. His colleague and co-author Bálint Hóman, who later became minister of culture, defined the school's connection with Hungarian history as follows: "Hungarian history is nothing but the history of the Hungarian soul, i.e., the description of those forms in which the Hungarian soul manifested itself for many millenniums."⁴¹ *Three Generations* established the basic guidelines of the conservative national liberals' canon. While it was motivated by the desire to answer the question "How have we gotten here?" it became much more. As historian Paul Hanebrink puts it, *Three Generations* "was a foundational text of Christian nationalist ideology, providing the

⁴⁰ For a contemporary account of the school, see Tibor Joó, *Bevezetés a szellemtörténetbe* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1935). For a modern assessment of the role of the *Geistesgeschichte* School in Hungarian historiography, see Steven Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1976. Distributed by Columbia University Press), 62–94.

⁴¹ Hóman, quoted in Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*, 65.

most influential scholarly presentation of the theses that united Christian nationalists in Hungary.”⁴²

In *Three Generations* Szekfű argued that the “First Generation” of reformers of the first half of the nineteenth century applied an understanding of Hungarian history and Hungarianness that was to be emulated. They promoted gradual or evolutionary progress based on cumulative reform of Hungary’s cultural, economic, and social life. The central figure of this era was István Széchenyi. In Szekfű’s reading, Széchenyi epitomized all that was great in his generation and the idea of a “conservative reform system.” Szekfű’s analysis went back to Széchenyi’s original critique: Hungary was a wasteland (*parlag*) and would remain so unless there was a moral and intellectual reconstruction of the entire nation. According to Szekfű’s reading, Széchenyi argued that this moral and intellectual reconstruction of the national spirit was needed in order to overcome what he called “ancestral sins of the nation”: vanity, conceit, “flash-in-the-pan elation,” public slothfulness, envy, factionalism or partisanship, and the yearning for power (*hiúság, önhietség, “szalmaláng lelkesedés,” közretség, irígység, pártviszály, and hatalomvágy*). All of these traits led to self-delusion, mystification, and daydreaming.⁴³ If a few of the seven deadly sins appear on this list, it is no accident, for both Széchenyi and Szekfű were Catholic. Though well-intentioned, Lajos Kossuth and his followers obstructed the hitherto positive developments, argued Szekfű. More importantly, they strayed from the historical concept of the nation (St. Stephen’s) and promoted French and even American liberal ideals ill-fitted to Hungarian reality. Szekfű harshly criticized those in the pantheon of Hungarian history (Lajos Kossuth, Bertalan Szemere, and even Sándor Petőfi, the national poet) for their radical/revolutionary liberalism and their embrace of nationalism.⁴⁴ Of course, this was not the first time Szekfű bucked prevailing historical norms. In his 1913 *A száműzött Rákóczi* (The Exiled Rákóczi), he had already launched a serious attack on established historical memory by offering a demythologizing account of eighteenth-century *kuruc* leader Ferenc Rákóczi.

⁴² Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 118.

⁴³ Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék—Egy hanyatló kor története*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Élet Kiadó, 1922), 10 and 59–65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111–220.

The “Second Generation” of Ferenc Deák and Gyula Andrássy, architects of the 1867 *Ausgleich*, received high marks from Szekfű. On the other hand, József Eötvös, because of his work on the Nationality Laws, which according to Szekfű further dismantled the idea of a political nation, received criticism, as did the liberal policies of Kálmán Tisza.⁴⁵ Szekfű also condemned the development of Hungarian capitalism. He argued that it was not Hungarian capitalist development because it was organized and run by Austrians and, more importantly, by Jews and because it was underpinned by foreign ideas of *laissez-faire* and free competition.⁴⁶ According to Szekfű, in viewing Jews as a religious community instead of an ethnic group, and allowing immigration, the Second Generation allowed Hungarian capitalism and economic life to acquire a Jewish character.

The “Third Generation” surrendered the country’s intellectual life to foreign elements, Szekfű argued.⁴⁷ It was the Third Generation, under (and despite) the leadership of István Tisza, which allowed for the influx of radical bourgeois influence and permitted Marxism to gain ground. It was the Third Generation, continued Szekfű, whose efforts at centralization made Budapest a center of radical liberalism and capitalism, while drowning out the energies and importance of the countryside. Consequently, his argument went on, Budapest and its “Jewish Hungarian culture” secured a monopoly over the cultural life of the entire nation.⁴⁸ Szekfű was also critical of the lesser nobility’s and even the aristocracy’s “abdication” of involvement in the economic and cultural development of the country, not becoming part of the middle class, and allowing the masses of the countryside to remain uneducated, thus permitting the internationalization of the working class.⁴⁹

Even a cursory examination of the issue of Hungarian *nemzetkarakterológia* cannot be complete without bringing Lajos Prohászka and his 1941 *A vándor és bujdosó* (The Wanderer and the Exile) into the discussion. While the book was published in 1941, it is actually a collection of studies published between 1932 and 1935. Prohászka shared

⁴⁵ Ibid., 301–4 and 333–35.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 340–55.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 356.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 384.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 443–57.

the cultural pessimism of Oswald Spengler, whose 1918 *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*Decline of the West* in its English translation) was widely read in Hungary. He was also clearly influenced by the *Geistesgeschichte* School, for he too believed that certain character traits determined the historical development of a given people. Prohászka set out to create Europe's national-identities map—in the fashion of José Ortega y Gasset and Salvador de Madariaga—with Germany and Hungary at its epicenter. In his construct, France was the stylizer (*stilizáló*), Greece the expressive one (*kifejező*), England the settler (*telepes*), and Italy the humanist, while Spain was ascribed Don Quixote-like characteristics.⁵⁰ Germany was characterized as the wanderer, as Prohászka argued that German national character was best described by an “eternal search,” an “unwillingness to settle down,” and a certain belief in limitless boundaries, which in turn resulted in emotional and physical mobility.⁵¹ A nation that shared a historical fate with Germany, argued Prohászka, was Hungary. Indeed, continued Prohászka, both nations were outsiders in Europe. But Hungary was not the same as Germany; on the contrary, the Hungarian national traits made Hungary the antithesis of Germany. Hungary's curse was to be born on the border of East and West. That was the reason for the duality of its character. On the one hand, it had a servile submission to great Western cultures. On the other, it defiantly wanted to guard its independent spirit. Neither of these attitudes, continued Prohászka, was beneficial to achieving self-understanding and self-knowledge. Coming from the East, Hungarians brought with them the spirit of the steppes—their marauding and adventuresome attitudes. Then, after arriving in Europe, the Hungarians were overcome by the “curse” of the steppes: a desire to be hidden from danger, to be closed in, to feel secure. The result was a feeling of *finitizmus*, a peculiar sentiment of naive complacency. This *finitizmus* makes Hungarians averse

⁵⁰ Lajos Prohászka, *A vándor és a bujdosó* (Budapest: Lucidus Kiadó, 2005), 34–59. Reprint of the 1941 edition. The word “*bujdosó*” is usually translated as “exile.” The translation of this noun is important, because Prohászka identified it with the Hungarian nation. As I will show, Prohászka's “*bujdosó*” does not actually mean “exile.” Instead it means someone who is hiding or remaining stationary. For a short, but useful, examination of Prohászka, see Miklós Lackó, “Egy nemes konzervatív. A kultúrfilozófus Prohászka Lajos,” *Történelmi Szemle* 40, nos. 3–4 (1998): 277–99.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71–106.

to anything that might be problematic and unresolved, while fighting for what is certain—even if it is scant. According to Prohászka, that is why advancement and growth is not an organic and flexible development in Hungary but always the result of outside impetus and often coming through violence and pain.⁵² Many “foundational experiences” came with the same duality. That is why a desire for independence turns into intellectual seclusion, deterministic belief leads to lack of ambition, and bravery leads to inevitable struggle, even if futile.⁵³ But all in all, concluded Prohászka, there is no Western Hungarian, nor is there an Eastern Hungarian. Both traits are found within the Hungarians. The unrepentant, stationary, and comfort-seeking Oriental is as much a part of Hungarianness as the forward-looking, European-oriented and new-direction-seeking Occidental.⁵⁴

Perhaps the best-known and most-often-cited example of interwar Hungarian *nemzetkarakterológia*, however, was the 1939 volume entitled *Mi a magyar?* (What Is Hungarian?). It was edited by Gyula Szekfű, and the contributors included some of the most outstanding intellectuals of the period, from the great *littérateur* Mihály Babits to the composer Zoltán Kodály. The book can be seen as a direct challenge to Prohászka’s dialectical construction, in which Hungary was the direct opposite of Germany. The anti-German sentiment among the intellectual and the cultural elite intensified during the late 1930s. Szekfű’s 1920 *Three Generations* was based on the concept in which Hungary was an established and significant component of a Christian-German community, which in time would grow into a Christian-Hungarian community.⁵⁵ While he remained critical of radical liberalism and capitalist society, his late 1920s and 1930s work, as seen in *Magyar Szemle*, indicates his turn to a more European orientation and his deep-seated distrust of Nazi Germany and its Hungarian imitators.⁵⁶ In his preface

⁵² Ibid., 117–22.

⁵³ Ibid., 126–41.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁵ Szekfű, *Három nemzedék*, 108.

⁵⁶ Gyula Szekfű, “A Turáni-szláv parasztállam,” *Magyar Szemle* 5, no. 17 (1929): 30–37. See also his 1934 *Three Generations and What Came Afterwards* (*Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*), which is an expanded version of his earlier 1920 work and illustrates Szekfű’s changing views.

Szekfű indicates that the volume was a product of the preceding few years' intellectual debate, which was a reaction to growing German influence, or, as he puts it, the "dark clouds" on the horizon of this "sunny country."⁵⁷

Perhaps the most intriguing contribution to the volume was by Sándor Eckhardt. As a literary historian educated at the Paris École Normale Supérieure, he sought to sketch out the nature of Hungarianness as seen from abroad. In Eckhardt's reading, the negative reputation of Hungary originated with the tenth-century Western European campaigns of the Magyar tribes. This image of a barbaric, bloodthirsty, and wild race continued to develop throughout medieval times, argued Eckhardt.⁵⁸ He further argued that this harmful characterization was resurrected in the 1823 French fables of Charles Athanase Walckenaer, who connected the old French word *Hongre* (for "Hungarian") with the monster-like creature, the ogre. Eckhardt, a scholar of French, pointed out that "ogre" actually originated from the Latin *orcus* (god of the underworld). Yet, he continued, this did not stop someone like the French historian Charles Seignobos from writing the following passage about the Hungarians in 1937: "They produced the impression of ferocious monsters and have left no trace behind them save their name, the French Hongrois having become ogres, supernatural beings who were supposed to eat children."⁵⁹ During the Ottoman attacks, the fighting spirit of the Hungarians was emphasized as a positive attribute, continued the author, because it was a fight for the protection of

⁵⁷ Gyula Szekfű, "A szerkesztő előszava," in *Mi a magyar?*, ed. Gyula Szekfű (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1939), 7.

⁵⁸ Sándor Eckhardt, "A magyarság külföldi arcképe," in *Mi a magyar?* 87–90.

⁵⁹ This translation is from the 1974 (!) English publication of Seignobos's book. I found other such characterizations of Hungarians in connection with this not-so-lovable ogre. For example, Charles Dickens wrote the following: "More than a thousand years ago, there wandered through the heaths of Asia . . . a rude Mongolian nation, a section of the Ugrian race whose wild ways in the conquered country gave the name of Ogre to the cannibal monsters of our nurseries . . . Our Ogre nation, the Magyars . . . would wander westward for the conquest of a new and better pasturage . . . Under [their] chiefs, the wild Hungarians, ugly Mongolian hordes, mounted on shaggy little ponies, spread abroad, and ravaged many parts of Europe." See Charles Dickens, "The Story of a Nation," *Household Words Conducted by Charles Dickens* 4, no. 89 (1851): 249–50.

Christendom. "The shield of Christianity," "the bastion of the West," and similar phrases earned Hungary some positive foreign responses. It was only a short reprieve. By the end of the seventeenth century, Hungary was once again represented in negative terms in the works of Western authors. In this view the central message was the uneducated, uncultured, and, one could say, uncivilized nature of Hungarians, with special emphasis on the backwardness of its ruling elite. According to Eckhardt, this detrimental understanding of Hungary and Hungarianness was promoted by the Viennese Court, which claimed that Hungarian culture as such did not exist. If there was anything Hungarian that was remotely related to civilization, it was due to the Germans, proclaimed the Viennese Court.⁶⁰ Nineteenth-century European romanticism rediscovered Hungary as a land of passion. Its symbols were the gallant hussar and the passionate Gypsy, with his dreamy music.⁶¹ The period during and after the Revolution of 1848, which gained Hungarians a great deal of sympathy, was the only time when the image of Hungary was as positive abroad as it was at home, declared Eckhardt. From here on, Europeans developed a dual perception of Hungarianness. On the one hand, they were seen as generally sympathetic, though somewhat anachronistic, chivalrous, gentlemanly folk who found enjoyment in fighting, merry-making, and Gypsy music—all in all, reminiscent of their wild, Oriental ancestors. On the other hand, these same Oriental traits were regarded as rendering Hungarians incapable of coping with a modern urban lifestyle. As a result they remained a sort of alien body in Europe, Eckhardt's study concluded.⁶²

Eckhardt's examination illuminates one of the key emotions of interwar Hungarian self-understanding, the feeling that nobody understands the Hungarians: their past is misunderstood, their contributions remain unappreciated, and their character has been distorted. Even so, Eckhardt made it clear that the fault did not lie with the West alone. As he saw it, Hungary's mistaken self-identification with Attila and his Huns, its glorification of its barbarian past, and the never-ending self-promotion of *puszta* (Great Hungarian Plain) romanticism were

⁶⁰ Eckhardt, "A magyarság külföldi arcképe," 100–107.

⁶¹ Ibid., 115–20.

⁶² Ibid., 120–30.

all harmful to the nation. He was not alone in thinking that the self-construction of identity and imagery had to be carefully considered because of its importance in influencing foreign public opinion. One of those who shared this sentiment was Kuno Klebelsberg.

Main Themes and Topoi

The political credo of Klebelsberg was a program that called for the rejuvenation and reconstruction of the country's cultural life. It was a loosely defined reform program—termed *neonacionalizmus*—that played an essential role in the development of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. He defined it in the following way: “solidarity of positive, active, productive, and constructive people in order to rebuild the destroyed country.” This work, continued Klebelsberg, required Hungarians to “consciously join forces while avoiding hyperbolic criticism and a negative attitude.” In addition, the minister of culture warned against self-celebration and self-aggrandizement of the past, just as he rejected squabbling in the name of patriotism. Klebelsberg stood in opposition to “naïve optimism,” but he also refused the pessimism of the “apostles of an ominous and despairing” future.⁶³

Klebelsberg's ultimate goal was to reform the country's cultural life in a way that would allow Hungary to join European cultural life. He called for action that would allow Hungary to maintain and expand its cultural superiority vis-à-vis the neighboring countries. This idea received a great deal of political support from the Bethlen government onward and became one of the leitmotifs of Hungarian identity construction and its imagery, and in turn, it was one of the basic guidelines of its cultural-diplomatic efforts. However, this does not mean that there was an agreement on the meaning of Hungarianness.

The question and meaning of Hungary's European character was the main source of the division. Europeaness in the contemporary Hungarian understanding meant advocating Western orientation and welcoming modernity. The problem of Hungarian belonging occupied the Hungarian imagination from the Enlightenment onward. Appre-

⁶³ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 5–6.

hension about belonging is clearly emphasized in the opening lines of Mihály Vörösmarty's 1828 poem, "Zrínyi." In the poet's words, Hungary is a "torn-away" and "kinless" nation that looks to the West, only to return its gloomy gaze to the East.⁶⁴ However, because many blamed Trianon on Europe—again, used as a shorthand for the West—the issue of European orientation was a thorny subject.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the radical liberals, an ideological movement originating among Budapest's young and bourgeois circles, became the unabashed promoter of European orientation and modernity. Members of this group, such as Karl Polányi, Karl Mannheim, György Lukács, and Oszkár Jászi, "became disillusioned by the emptiness of the patriotic sloganeering that permeated political and social life."⁶⁵ Their debates were published in their newly founded journal, *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century). It was here that Jászi began to formulate the basic principles of a political and cultural movement. In his article "Az új Magyarország felé" ("Toward the New Hungary"), he argued that the image of modern Hungary should not be dominated by the medieval figures of a holy prince and a saintly nun. He called for the modernization of Hungarian society and culture, the abolition of the semi-feudal political and economic system, and the secularization of society.⁶⁶

One of the devoted readers of *Huszadik Század* was Endre Ady, whom most considered the founder of Hungarian literary modernism. His 1906 collection *Új versek* (New Poems) represents a radical break with the prevailing tradition of national romanticism. In his poems and essays, he offered a relentless criticism of Hungarian reality. Ady condemned the backwardness of the societal structure and its cultural milieu. In Péter Hanák's words, "Ady and his radical compatriots fought against the pressing backwardness of Hungary, which had been caused by the prevailing remnants of the feudal past: chauvinism, clericalism, and the big estates and the political rule of the latifundian

⁶⁴ "Néz nyugatra, borús szemmel néz vissza keletre / A magyar, elszakadott testvértelen ága nemének." Mihály Vörösmarty, "Zrínyi," in *Összes versei* (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1961), 141.

⁶⁵ Attila Pók, "Jászi as the Organizational Leader of a Reform Movement," *Hungarian Studies* 18, nos. 1–2 (1991): 17.

⁶⁶ Oszkár Jászi, "Az új Magyarország felé," *Huszadik Század* 8 (1907): 1–12.

aristocracy.”⁶⁷ In his poem titled “*A magyar ugaron*” (“On The Magyar Fallow”), he painted a picture of a regressive Hungary:

I walk on meadows run to weed,
on field of burdock and of mallow.
I know this rank and ancient ground—
this is the Magyar fallow.⁶⁸

In this “fallow”—to connect the previous poem with another—stands “the lost horseman” of the Hungarians. Unlike Beöthy’s proud and warrior-like horseman, Ady’s horseman, the Hungarian of his day, is a lost and apprehensive character:

You hear the hollow hoofbeats of
a horseman lost since long ago.
The shackled soul of ghosted woods
an ancient reedlands wake to woe.⁶⁹

Ady and many others in his circle were often attacked by the literary and political establishment, “questioning and even denying his Magyar patriotism.”⁷⁰ However, unlike his Viennese counterparts, Ady and other like-minded intellectuals “never had the faintest doubt or uncertainty about their national loyalty. [Their] Magyar identity was redundant.”⁷¹

The heirs to the *fin-de-siècle* radical liberals were members of a new intellectual left-leaning group of the late 1920s and 1930s called “*urbánus*” by contemporaries. The new group stood against the status quo of the Horthy regime. This intellectual and cultural current was best represented by the likes of Pál Ignóty, Ferenc Fejtő, and Béla

⁶⁷ Péter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 167.

⁶⁸ Endre Ady, “A magyar ugaron,” trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in Makkai, *In Quest of the Miracle Stag*, 403.

⁶⁹ Endre Ady, “Az eltévedt lovas,” trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in Makkai, *In Quest of the Miracle Stag*, 418.

⁷⁰ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 169.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Zsolt. They rejected the discontinuation of liberalization that was taking place both at the societal and the cultural level. They stood against growing anti-Semitic sentiment and promoted Jewish assimilation, which they saw as an essential component of a much-needed new Hungarian identity. They loudly promoted a Western European orientation, progressive modernity, and democratic values. While most shared the abovementioned attitudes, the *urbánus* group was far from unified; as such, they did not have a unified Hungarian ideal-type, nor did they have an established political platform to speak of.⁷² However, the progressive, modernizing, and European outlook of the *urbánus* circles was an influential cultural and intellectual movement that had a concrete impact on the official image construction.

The *fajvédők*, on the other hand, squarely rejected any orientation toward Europe, along with Europe's liberalism and its penchant for modernity. While their ideology was rooted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the movement was born in the turmoil that followed World War I.⁷³ The number of parties, societies, and associations that could be placed under the umbrella of *fajvédők* is simply staggering—as is the sheer volume of their publications. While there were undoubtedly similarities between the early 1920s movements of the Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület, the Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete, and the Etelközi Szövetség, they cannot be equated with either the mid-1930s movements aping German/Italian national socialism (Magyar Nemzeti Szocialista Munkáspárt, Egyesült Nemzeti Szocialista Párt, or the Nemzeti Akarat Pártja) or with the later Nyilaskeresztes Párt (Arrow Cross Party) of Ferenc Szálasi.⁷⁴

The early membership of *fajvédő* movements was largely based on the returning young officer corps of the *k.u.k.* army. They were also the backbone of the counter-revolutionary forces gathered in the southern Hungarian city of Szeged and served as the military arm of the early Horthy government. Among these returning officers were Gyula Gömbös and Miklós Kozma. Both of them, as we will see, played a significant role in Hungarian politics. The basic idea

⁷² Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok*, 197–200.

⁷³ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁴ There were many more organizations—both political and social—that could be listed here. I have only selected the best-known ones.

behind the movement was that liberal—or rather, what they saw as liberal—government yielded to foreign influences, which in turn led to war and the demise of historic Hungary. By “foreign influences” they meant Hungary’s Jewish population, albeit not only that, for later many spoke out against German influence too. While they did not see Jewish assimilation as a real possibility, and they argued for limiting the role of Jews in Hungary’s economic and cultural life, they did not seek the Jews’ physical destruction. Therefore, to lump them in with the other anti-Semitic movements of the time would not be telling the whole story. In their view, Hungary had to be rejuvenated, and a new Hungarian ideal-type was needed to face the challenges of the postwar order and to secure the continuing existence of the Hungarian nation. They had various prescriptions. As a result, the *fajvédő* movement was simultaneously anti-Semitic and anti-clerical, anti-capitalist and anti-Bolshevik, anti-bourgeois and anti-nobility, but almost universally anti-European.⁷⁵

According to their historical understanding, explained by the pseudo-scientific approach of the Turanist movement, Hungarians belonged to the Orient, as they shared common Ural-Altaic origins with Turkish, Bulgarian, Finnish, Estonian, and Mongolian people. Some even included Koreans and Japanese in this grouping and dreamed of a pan-Turanian conglomeration that would counterbalance Western hegemony. Others saw it as a way to find equilibrium vis-à-vis pan-German and pan-Slav ideologies. To them the Hungarian peasantry remained the only guardian of the country’s Oriental past, and as such, safeguarded the future.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ For the most comprehensive account of these groups, see János Gyurgyák, *Magyar fajvédők. Eszmetörténeti tanulmány* (Budapest: Osiris, 2012).

⁷⁶ There is a difference between the Turanist Society (*Turáni Társaság*) and the Hungarian Turanist Union (*Magyarországi Turáni Szövetség*). The former was European-oriented. The aforementioned ideology was representative of the latter. The Turanist Society originated in the last third of the nineteenth century as a scientific (linguistic) project that sought to prove or disprove the Hungarian language’s Finno-Ugric origin. Interest in the movement was further amplified by political and economic motivations, as the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy sought to carve out its own area of influence. The Turanist Society (*Turáni Társaság*), established in 1910, aimed to bring together the various interests in order to promote further

Dezső Szabó's 1919 novel *Az elsodort falu* (The Village That Was Swept Away) was the literary manifestation of the *fajvédő* ideology.⁷⁷ The novel is set in Transylvania. The choice is not accidental, for Szabó, like many others, located the roots of what remained "true Hungarianness" in Transylvania's Hungarian villages. The main character, János Bőjthe, the scion of a noble family with a lineage supposedly going back to Attila the Hun, turns against the prevailing aristocratic order, rebels against capitalist and modernizing life, and rejects the foreign influences of Jews and Germans. As a final act of defiance, he marries a peasant girl, giving emphasis to Szabó's main claim that the future of Hungary rests with the "purity" of the Hungarian peasantry.

The movement of the so-called *népi* writers, for the most part, shared the *fajvédő* movement's apprehension about European orientation and modernity.⁷⁸ However, the ideology was borrowed from the Left as well as from the Right. Dezső Szabó's influence, Ady's

research. See Balázs Ablonczy, "'Lándzsahegy,' néprokonság, small talk: turanizmus és keleti gondolat a két világháború közötti magyar külpolitikai gondolkodásban," in *Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 88–89. The society remained active until 1945. The list of influential people associated with the society is very impressive. It included prime ministers (Dénes Berinkey, Teleki, Bethlen, Gömbös, and Kálmán Darányi) and KÜM officials (Zoltán Gerevich, Lajos Villányi, Zoltán Baranyai, and Domokos Szent-Iványi); as such, the society was closely connected with government circles. On Turanism in general, see Joseph A. Kessler, "Turanism and Pan-Turanism in Hungary: 1890–1945" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1967), x–li.

⁷⁷ Szabó's status and legacy remains a contested topic. See, for example, Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 82. Berend places Dezső Szabó squarely within the *népi* camp.

⁷⁸ Just as "race defender" is not a good translation of the Hungarian *fajvédő*, the English word "populist" is not the correct translation for the word *népi*. Nor should the *népi* movement be equated with the German *völkisch* movement. Perhaps it has more commonality with the pre-World War I German *Jugendbewegung* or the Russian *narodniki* movements. I will continue to use the Hungarian word throughout this study. For an interesting essay on the place of *népi* ideology in modern Hungarian intellectual discourse, see Gábor Kovács, "A népi mozgalom helye a politikai eszmetörténetben," *Beszélő* 10, no. 6 (2005), <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/a-nepi-mozgalom-helye-a-politikai-eszmetortenetben> (accessed February 4, 2012).

legacy, and Jászi's program were equally represented within the *népi* view. In late 1920s, when the ideology became a significant current in Hungarian cultural and political life, membership in the new movement included socially sensitive middle-class intellectuals growing up in the radical bourgeois tradition and a new intellectual circle with peasant origins. However, virtually everyone agreed on the need for radical changes in the social, economic, and cultural life of the peasantry. Members of the *népi* movement, too dreamed of a new Hungary. The vehicle by which to reach this new Hungary was peasant tradition and peasant culture, which they saw as a besieged, endangered identity. However, the ideology behind the *népi* current was more than simple peasant romanticism. While the radical peasant orientation was a shared feature—together with anti-clericalism, anti-capitalism, and the rejection of the existing political structure—they were divided on many other issues, including but not limited to the question of Jewish assimilation. As a result, the spectrum of *népi* movement's contribution includes everything between that of the far Right and the far Left. As Trencsényi rightly points out, one of the misfortunes of interwar Hungarian cultural life was the *urbánus* and *népi* intellectuals' inability to bridge their differences. Consequently, they were unable to create a common anti-fascist front that could have created a common discourse of national independence and could have safeguarded liberal values against racial discrimination.⁷⁹

Perhaps the most influential representative of the *népi* current, László Németh, was also the main architect of its political/ideological offshoot: the third way (*harmadik út*). It was based on a critical review of Western culture, which, Németh argued, had reached the zenith of its existence. According to this interpretation, totalitarian dictatorships, in both their Bolshevik and Nazi varieties, were nothing less than a last-ditch effort at some sort of renewal.⁸⁰ He pointed toward the untapped energies of Central and Eastern Europe as the source of renewal not only for the narrower region but for Europe as a whole.

⁷⁹ Trencsényi, *A nép lelke*, 415.

⁸⁰ Miklós Lackó, *Sziget és a külvilág—válogatott tanulmányok* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1996), 176–77.

The best-known member of the group of *népi* writers, Gyula Illyés, represented the left wing of the movement. His political agenda was simple: he wanted to enhance the quality of life for his kinfolk, the people of the deep countryside, and the masses of landless peasants. His 1936 *Puszták népe* (People of the Puszta) was a unique blend of sociological examination and literary essay. His *puszta* is not in the Great Plains of Eastern Hungary but rather the south Transdanubian countryside of Western Hungary. He sought to destroy the idealized and romanticized picture of the countryside that some of his contemporaries continued to paint. Instead he offered a critical look at the living conditions and problems of the Hungarian countryside, with its own social hierarchy, its own—sometimes brutal—laws and justice, and with its own isolated culture. He presented this as a “wild” and “dangerous” world where no shared morality safeguarded the virtue of young women, where the concept of private property was different, and where even the smell of everyday life could have been offensive to outsiders.⁸¹ The landless peasants of the *puszta* were the unknown and forgotten people of Hungary, as Illyés put it: “In general everybody forgot them in every age until it had become a custom. Not only [had] the statesmen of all times, but the scholars too passed them over. Thus there are even fewer ‘genuine’ details of their past than of their present.”⁸² His peasants were not the mythologized peasants of the *fajvédő* representing the bravery and intractability of Attila and Árpád. His peasant heroes were those who succeeded in breaking out of this world: the butcher’s assistant in a provincial town, a railway porter, or a tram driver.⁸³ Illyés’s portrayal should not be seen as negative. He was a son of the *puszta*. He also appreciated its inhabitants’ warmth and hard work, as well as their connection to the land, but he wanted to offer a realistic picture of their life in order to address the real social

⁸¹ Gyula Illyés, *People of the Puszta*, trans. G. F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1967), 34–35 and *passim*. I used the English translation of this great work, which is widely available, as my way of recommending it to an English-speaking readership.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 278.

and economic problems that these people were facing day by day.⁸⁴ It was an eye-opening read for many and furthered the interest of the countryside and its peasant culture.

The *népi* camp did not gain political prominence during the interwar years. Some of its members turned to the Communist Left, while others moved closer to the Hungarian Nazis. Its significance was represented in its cultural prominence and the role it played in the *népi-urbánus* controversy. This dispute between the two groups over the nature and future of Hungarian culture indeed had a considerable impact on the official identity and image construction.

Conservative national liberals, the most important and most influential of all the intellectual and cultural currents, promoted a European orientation. Their construct was based on the Christian-national ideology, which was the basic foundation of official government policy, and as such, the most significant element of official identity and image construction.

In the mid- to late 1920s, the overriding consensus among the political elite pointed toward a European-oriented—that is, Western-oriented—policy. Klebelsberg, for example, readily acknowledged that Hungary's roots were in Asia. He also went as far as to agree with those

⁸⁴ Another interesting—albeit less well-known—*népi* intellectual was Zoltán Szabó. One of his main concepts was the idea of “intellectual defense of the homeland” (*szellemi honvédelem*). As the name suggests, *szellemi honvédelem* was a call to arms. He rejected the false dichotomy of people (*nép*) and nation (*nemzet*) and advocated a politically independent national culture. He also presented a different vision for the reorganization of East-Central Europe. This went against the spirit of Hungarian imperial dreams, for he promoted the “Europe of small nations.” In his view, the greatness of a nation depended not on its size but on its contribution to the betterment of humanity. Therefore, he continued, small nations such as Hungary should not try to mimic their larger counterparts (a hawk should not try to imitate an elephant). As a result, Hungary should prepare its culture for the moment when the whole of humanity would be disappointed with the emptiness of grand ideas and be an example to others by showing the “great depths of a small tarn.” See Zoltán Szabó, “Szellemi honvédelem,” in *Magyar Néző*, ed. András Sándor (Budapest: Természet- és társadalombarát Fejlődésért Közalapítvány és Kortárs Kiadó, 2002), 17; and Zoltán Szabó, “Magyarság és Közép-Európa,” in *Magyar Néző*, ed. András Sándor (Budapest: Természet- és társadalombarát Fejlődésért Közalapítvány és Kortárs Kiadó, 2002), 62–64.

looking toward the East that some Asian racial characteristics remained intact. However, argued Klebelsberg, for millennia Hungarians had been living in the heart of Europe. He did not question the notion that Europe showed its “ungrateful” side to Hungary with the Treaty of Trianon, which to him was clearly “unjust and brutal,” yet he disagreed with those who called for a break with the West. Breaking relations with the West would mean rejecting a traditional European outlook that was exemplified by St. Stephen, King Matthias, and István Széchenyi and would have amounted to the rejection of the very essence of Hungarianness, Klebelsberg held. To refuse modern reforms in the center of Europe, concluded the minister, would be “absurd,” and the nation would vanish.⁸⁵ This anxiety about the nature of the Hungarian-European relationship was perhaps best verbalized by Dezső Kosztolányi. His poem “Európa” (Europe) reveals the feeling of betrayal and disappointment Hungarians felt toward Europe, but also illustrates how anger was subdued and turned into a plea:

Europe, to you,
by you, praising you, I present my plea
from this century’s blind botching,
and as others bury you, tolling through the night,
with a shrill dithyramb, with joy,
with good morning I greet you.

O primordial continent,
you ancient, you roughened, you holy, you majestic
tutor of souls, filter of scents and tastes,
worker of wonders, bravely-browed, bookish,
antique Europe.

My stepmother even, then I would contend for you
and spank you with mouthings and prank you with
kisses
and yoke you in phrases, so at last you love me.

⁸⁵ Klebelsberg, *Jöjjetek harmincas évek!* 49–50.

From here who could tear me,
 from here who could tear me, could snatch from your
 bosom?
 Have I not always been your pure son, and faithful?
 Have I not always since I was a brat, sitting
 at night in the rays of my lamp, learning your lesson,
 attending, marveling at your hundred-tongued speech,
 so that each word insinuated itself in my heart?
 Since then my ravings have been understood;
 wherever they fling me I have hundreds of kinsmen,
 wherever they break me I have one thousand brothers.⁸⁶

The Hungarian political elite's incontestable commitment to Europe had to do with much more than a simple case of belonging. They were convinced that Hungary could not afford to turn its back on the very concept that was the main message of its cultural-diplomatic campaign, which was the Europeaness of the country. The state concept of St. Stephen (*Szent István-i állameszme*)—promoted, among others, by Gyula Szekfű—offered a historical justification for this claim and became the basic foundation of Hungarianness at home and abroad.

The figure of St. Stephen was perfectly fitted to serve as both a religious and secular symbol. The first Christian king of Hungary became, in interwar image construction, a symbol of Hungary's commitment to Western Christianity, and consequently, to Europe. This commitment in Hungarian historical memory was more than a symbolic gesture. It made the country the "bulwark" or "shield" of Christendom, ensuring that the West was able to continue its uninterrupted development.⁸⁷ Under government direction, the St. Stephen's Day (August 20) celebration was transformed from the saint's feast day to a national holiday. The holiday was to represent the Christian unity of the country and the celebration of the nation's Christian character, which was seen as an eternal linchpin between Hungary and Europe.

⁸⁶ Selection from Dezső Kosztolányi, *Európa*, trans. Alan Dixon, http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Kosztol%C3%A1nyi_Dezs%C5%91/Eur%C3%B3pa/en/2037-Europe (accessed February 12, 2012).

⁸⁷ For more on this, see Ignác Romsics, "From Christian Shield to EU Member," *Hungarian Quarterly* 48, no. 186 (2007): 3–27.

This was one of the few instances where government policy successfully overcame divisions. Confessional rhetoric, Catholic or Protestant, had a very limited place. As historian Paul Hanebrink puts it, “church leaders had to acknowledge that the state’s interest in national unity took precedence. Religious activists could pursue their confessional interests only as long as they furthered the government’s policy of consolidation.”⁸⁸

St. Stephen, as a secular figure, was also the symbol of Hungary’s “civilizing mission,” which cultural diplomacy offered as one of the key rationalizations for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. According to this rationalization, as the first king of Hungary, St. Stephen broke with the tribal traditions and established a new political entity: the Kingdom of Hungary. This kingdom was built on the lines of Western European feudalism; hence it was quintessentially European in its essence and structure. Moreover, his legacy also served as a justification for claims that the Hungarians had a special talent for state-building, unlike other nationalities in the region. This also fit an enduring argument: the historical kingdom of St. Stephen and its successors was a political nation, not an ethnic nation. This argument, which was based on some very dubious evidence, was to counter Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav claims to the contrary. Finally, it also served as historical evidence for a contemporary manifestation of the Hungarian imperial dream: the multinational empire of St. Stephen based on the concept of *pax Hungarica*. According to this interpretation, the basic foundation of the Kingdom of Hungary was and should be the maintenance of European and Western civilization on the frontier of Asiatic and European culture.⁸⁹ In this political framework, Hungarians would continue to play the role of first among equals—just as the English distinguished themselves within the British Crown, argued a contemporary advocate of the idea.⁹⁰ Cultural diplomacy sought to represent and promote all these ideas in its campaign to convince international public opinion about the need for the continuing existence of a strong Hungary within revised borders.

⁸⁸ Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 110–14 and 117.

⁸⁹ László Ottlik, “Pax Hungarica,” *Magyar Szemle* 22, no. 87 (1934): 289–97.

⁹⁰ László Ottlik, “Új Hungária felé,” *Magyar Szemle* 4, no. 13 (1928): 9.

Conclusion

Hungarian cultural diplomacy faced a conundrum at its very conception. There was effectively a collective agreement within governmental and intellectual circles that cultural diplomacy needed to be pursued, yet there was great disagreement about what image to project. While there had been discussion about the Hungarian national character in the past, World War I and the subsequent crisis—which in the case of Hungary, and most East-Central European countries, was not only cultural but also economic and political—altered the nature of the debate. Intellectuals and politicians alike sought to redefine the nation's image abroad in order to ensure the country's continuing existence and to build a case for challenging the status quo. The almost obsessive questioning of the country's national character and its relationship to Europe divided the cultural and intellectual elite. Conservative national liberals dominated the discussion, for they possessed political power. They made it clear that the country was to follow a European orientation. However, as the following chapters will show, they could not disregard opposing views of Hungarianness. Therefore, cultural diplomacy remained a curious, often perplexing, combination of new and old, traditional and modern, in which the modern and progressive served as a proof of Europeanness while the traditional sought to depict uniqueness. Thus the following chapters trace out the machinery of cultural diplomacy as it developed and the struggles to find the right content for cultural diplomacy's various forms. This enterprise was accompanied by feelings of hope, pride, confidence, and conviction as well as anguish, self-effacement, hesitation, and doubt.

Chapter 3

Educating International Public Opinion: Cultural Institutions and Scholarly Publications

“Never were the peoples of the world so anxious to appear in a favorable light before the public opinion of other countries.”

— *István Bethlen*, 1936¹

In 1936 Bethlen wrote these words in the inaugural issue of the *Hungarian Quarterly*, the country’s first English-language scholarly journal. No longer prime minister, he nevertheless remained a central figure of Hungary’s cultural-diplomatic campaign, which he had helped launch in the mid-1920s. He explained that the Great War and the subsequent peace treaties showed the world that public opinion mattered and that no nation was truly the master of its own destiny. “These experiences induced many nations,” wrote Bethlen, “especially the small ones, to launch, on the one hand, [an] assiduous campaign of propaganda in order to present themselves in a favorable light to the Western nations; while, on the other, a general movement was started to promote an international spiritual intercourse.”² This chapter will illustrate that the distinction between an “assiduous campaign of propaganda” and genuine interest in the promotion of international understanding was often in the

¹ Stephen Bethlen [István Bethlen], “The Hungarian Quarterly, Its Aim and Scope,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1936): 3.

² Ibid.

eyes of the beholder. Hungarians were sincerely anxious about their international image. They understood that in the contemporary geopolitical climate, there was even a difference among “small countries.” This understanding of the power of national reputation was best articulated by János Hankiss: “Once there are vultures circling above the destiny of a small nation, it matters whether it is called Holland or Abyssinia, Switzerland or Montenegro, Belgium or Panama.”³ He claimed that the outcome of the treaty would undoubtedly have been different if “Western public opinion had looked at Hungary as a recognized first-class ‘small’ nation, not a fairytale land of shepherds, gypsies, and oligarchs.”⁴

Hungarians reacted to what they perceived as a lack of international understanding of the country’s cultural contribution and historical deeds with a healthy dose of righteous indignation and a narrative that was a curious mixture of victimization and hubris based on supposed exceptionalism. Zoltán Magyary, state secretary of culture under Klebelsberg, summed up the challenges: one “cannot escape being measured,” but the Hungarian nation has the capacity to ensure that it will not be found wanting, for “it is not only a question of national honor but the precondition of a better future.”⁵ Gyula Kornis, Klebelsberg’s state secretary of education, went further. While readily acknowledging that because of the rather esoteric nature of the Hungarian language, Europe was not aware of the Hungarian contribution to the historical and scientific development of Western civilization, he argued that neighboring countries and their international allies either totally ignored Hungarian research or used it for their own purposes.⁶ Kornis argued that one of the most endangered elements of Hungarian culture was its history, for “the enemies”—almost certainly a reference to the successor states of Romania and Czechoslovakia and perhaps, to a lesser degree, Yugoslavia and Austria—were “sparing neither money nor energy” to conduct research, to establish journals and magazines, and to open new institutes

³ János Hankiss, *A kultúrdiplomácia alapvetése* (Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Társaság, 1937), 9.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵ Zoltán Magyary, “Tudománypolitikánk mai állapota és e mű programja,” in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 16.

⁶ Gyula Kornis, “A szellemi tudományok múltja, jelene, és jövő feladatai,” in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 116.

devoted to history. On the other hand, he continued, Hungarians not only failed to put up a defense but “do not even have the prerequisite of a defense,” that is, to survey the field and keep an eye on developments related to the history of Hungary and the region.⁷ To address these problems, Hungarians launched a cultural-diplomatic campaign and designed a new science policy (*tudománypolitika*) focusing on enlightening the intellectual elite, present and future, on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸

⁷ Kornis, “A szellemi tudományok,” 117. Here Kornis is being a bit harsh on his colleagues, for the KÜM and the VKM both monitored the relevant literature.

⁸ This chapter will focus on the government’s effort abroad. However, the domestic scene is also very interesting. One of the most significant domestic accomplishments of Klebelsberg and his successor, Bálint Hóman, was the creation of the *népiskola* system. The *népiskola* was a public elementary school that was most prevalent in the countryside. It was especially challenging in places where the population lived in the *tanya* structure, which was essentially a collection of loosely connected homesteads. After Trianon, Hungary lost approximately 67 percent of its elementary schools. An average *népiskola* in 1920 boasted 130 students and 2.9 teachers. Between 1922 and 1925, only 150 new schools were built. Under the new government program of 1926, the public education program gained momentum. The result was the opening of 1,096 new *népiskola* between 1926 and 1931. The growth continued—albeit more slowly—throughout the 1930s. Despite continuing challenges, the program proved successful in curtailing illiteracy. In 1930–1931, among the Hungarian population six years and older, 7 percent were illiterate (in 1910 it was 33 percent, and in 1920 it was 15 percent). The corresponding illiteracy rate in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia was about 5 percent. By comparison—to illustrate the remarkable success of the program—illiteracy among the same segment of the population in Yugoslavia was 45 percent, in Romania 42 percent, in Bulgaria 39 percent, and in Poland 23 percent. Secondary education also underwent some restructuring. According to the new model, there were three different types of secondary schools: 1) *reáliskola* (which emphasized the natural sciences), 2) *humán gimnázium* (classical education focusing on Latin, Greek, and history), and 3) *reálgimnázium* (which emphasized the humanities, Latin, French, and German). The transformation of the domestic scene also included the reorganization of Hungarian university life, the creation of the Biological Institute at Tihany to study the flora and fauna of Lake Balaton, the Astronomical Observatory (Csillagvizsgáló Intézet) at Buda, and the National Hungarian University of Collections (Országos Magyar Gyűjteményegyetem). See Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 175–79; and Stephan Michael Herzog, “Negotiating Modernity: Cultural Reform in 1920s Hungary” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 141–51.

Academic institutions and scholarly journals were the prime instruments of this campaign with three clearly articulated targets. First, as Magyary explained, they were to erect cultural centers and institutions abroad to serve as the country's foreign outposts. Second, these places were to be staffed with a select group of highly qualified intellectuals to act as "sentinels" of Hungarian culture, building and maintaining connections with the host country's intellectual elite. Finally, cultural policy was to disseminate information and knowledge through lectures and scholarly publications illustrating the Hungarian historical and cultural contribution to the development of Western civilization.⁹ By 1927 the political climate and the country's financial situation allowed the government, spearheaded by Klebelsberg's VKM, to start its ambitious program designed to change Hungary's foreign image one cultural center, one lecture, and one scholarly article at a time.

Institutions

Before the 1920s, there were three Hungarian cultural institutions abroad. The first was the Pazmaneum in Vienna, a seminary founded in 1623 by Cardinal Péter Pázmány, a leading figure of the Hungarian Counter-Reformation. The second, the Hungarian Historical Institute (Magyar Történeti Intézet) in Rome, was also the fruit of individual initiative, established in 1895 by Bishop Vilmos Fraknói, a priest and historian whose earliest work was about the life and works of Cardinal Pázmány.¹⁰ The third was the short-lived Hungarian Scientific Institute (Magyar Tudományos Intézet) in Constantinople. Klebelsberg, then head of the Hungarian Historical Society (Magyar Történelmi Társulat), argued in 1917 for a government-organized and -funded scholarship system to enable students to further their education abroad and

⁹ Zoltán Magyary, "Célok és feladatok," in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 471.

¹⁰ Gábor Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék: politika, kultúra és történettudomány a "neobarokk társadalomban"* (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2010), 102. I would like to thank the author for allowing me to read this outstanding study in its manuscript form.

thus provide for the country's future intellectual reserve.¹¹ The institute in Constantinople was the first realization of his dream. As director (January 1917–September 1918), he organized lectures and other events to foster cooperation among Hungarian, German, Austrian, and Turkish scholars.¹²

After 1920 the VKM and the KÜM reorganized the country's cultural production. While the majority of the burden was under the VKM's purview, the KÜM also had a cultural section. As the head of department responsible for intercultural relations, Géza Paikert, remembered many years later, the stated goal of the cultural section was to emphasize that Hungarian culture was an integral and inseparable part of European culture.¹³ The Foreign Ministry was also very aware that the neighboring countries, especially Czechoslovakia, had a head start. For example, in 1928 then-president Tomáš Masaryk pledged six million Czech crowns (approx. \$164,500–\$197,400) toward the construction of a Slavonic Institute in London's King's College, which remained the institutional center of pro-Czechoslovak intellectuals throughout the interwar years.¹⁴ To be competitive required a great deal of money, something not in abundance in postwar Hungary. Klebelsberg and company fought an uphill battle trying to convince the Parliament and media that supporting scholarly reforms was far from a "luxury." He argued that spending money on building scientific/academic institutions at home and abroad was an absolute necessity, because Hungary could not afford to let its culture "shrink," since one of the principal tenets of the Hungarian revisionist claim was that Hungarians were able to create a greater and better-quality culture

¹¹ József Deér, "A külföldi collégiumok," *Magyar Szemle*, October 1931, 112.

¹² Gábor Ujváry, *Tudományszervezés – Történetkutatás – Forráskritika* (Győr: Győr-Sopron Megye Levéltára, 1996), 68.

¹³ G. C. Paikert (Géza Paikert), "Hungarian Foreign Policy in Intercultural Relations, 1919–1944," *American Slavic and East European Review* 11, no. 1 (1952): 43. Géza Charles Paikert was the head of the Division of Intercultural Affairs at the VKM in the 1930s, and from 1947 to 1975, professor of history and political science at Le Moyne College in New York.

¹⁴ The Czechoslovak government had delivered on its pledge by 1938. See I. W. Roberts, *History of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1915–1990* (London: SSEES University of London, 1991), 25–39.

than their neighbors.¹⁵ Despite the considerable difficulties, Klebelsberg was able to secure significant funds for the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. In the 1920–1921 state budget, the VKM received 3.23 percent of the total budget. By 1923–1924, the VKM received 7.27 percent of the state budget, and in 1927–1928, Klebelsberg asked for and received over 10 percent of the total budget.¹⁶

Klebelsberg modeled his comprehensive reform of Hungarian education and culture, from kindergarten to the scientific research institutions, by utilizing foreign models. First and foremost, he looked to the Prussian/German *Wissenschaftspolitik*. He was particularly impressed with the works of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft (1911) and the achievements of the *der Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft* (1920). Hungarians did not simply use German institutions as their sole model.¹⁷ Klebelsberg wanted to avoid the dominating influence of any one culture. Instead he sought to infuse Hungary with the best that all cultures offered. He called this “cultural-political chemistry” (*kultúr-politikai vegyészet*).¹⁸ That is why Zoltán Magyary traveled widely, studying similar institutions and universities worldwide, including, against some objections from the Foreign Ministry, even to the Soviet Union. In the end Klebelsberg convinced Parliament of the necessity of investing in culture and education. The VKM received the necessary

¹⁵ Kuno Klebelsberg, *Elnöki megnyitó beszéd: a Magyar Történelmi Társulat 1920. évi május hó 14-én tartott közgyűlésén* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1920), 15.

¹⁶ Data presented in Ujváry, “Egy európai formátumú államférfi”: *Klebelsberg Kuno (1875–1932)*, 95. I do not have detailed budgetary statistics for Czechoslovakia and Romania. However, statistics illustrate that Czechoslovak budgetary expenditures earmarked for education, which were 8.28 percent in 1924, grew only to 8.62 percent by 1929. On the other hand, in Romania, where illiteracy was a significant problem, education received 11.37 percent of the budget in 1924, and provisional estimates suggested that it received 14.03 percent of the 1928 budget. Statistics in I. Spigler, “Public Finance,” in *The Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919–1975*, vol. 2, *Interwar Policy, the War and Reconstruction*, ed. M. C. Kaser and E. A. Radice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 168–69.

¹⁷ For more on this, see Gábor Ujváry, “Baráti háromszög (Carl Heinrich Becker, Klebelsberg Kuno, Gragger Róbert és a hungarológia megszületése),” *Hungarológia*, March 2000, 99–120.

¹⁸ Sándor Domanovszky, “Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno,” *Napkelet* 21 (1936): 79.

financial support and launched a program that included establishing the Collegium Hungaricum system.¹⁹

The first institutes were the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna and the Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin, both opened in 1924. These establishments served dual purposes. They were to aid Hungarians studying abroad and contribute to the development of a new, European-oriented, educated, and cultured elite. They were also to function as representative institutions of Hungarian culture. As Antal Lábán, the director of the Vienna institute, stated: "These institutions shall be evidence of Hungary's will and aptitude to endure."²⁰ They were places of international academic exchange, of support for foreign students interested in Hungarian topics, and of housing for libraries and exhibitions.

When the government announced its active foreign policy in 1927, educating international public opinion became an even more essential part of cultural diplomacy. Act XIII of 1927, "Hungarian Institutions Abroad and the Scholarship Program Serving High Cultural Aims" ("A külföldi magyar intézetekről és a magas műveltség célját szolgáló ösztöndijakról"), was passed by Parliament and further boosted Klebelsberg's program. It called for the further development of existing institutions and for the establishment of new ones.²¹ Subsequently, the VKM received 1,200,000 Hungarian pengő (approx. \$210,526) to establish new outposts of Hungarian culture.²² Shortly thereafter, the government purchased the Palazzo Falconieri in Rome, and the third Collegium Hungaricum opened.

¹⁹ Between 1925 and 1930, the VKM received almost 10 percent of the total budget, more than double what it received in the years between 1900 and 1913. See Romsics, *Magyarország története*, 175.

²⁰ Antal Lábán, *A bécsi Collegium Hungaricum* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1928), 27.

²¹ *Ezer év törvényei, 1927/XIII*, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7697> (accessed May 11, 2010).

²² This amount did not include the 200,000 pengő (approx. \$35,087) allocated to the renovation/enlargement of Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna. Nor did it include the "regularly scheduled" 380,000 pengő (approx. \$66,666) that was given for the maintenance of already existing institutions and scholarships. See *Ezer év törvényei, 1927/XI*, <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=7695> (accessed May 11, 2010).

Each of these places of learning had a specialization. Vienna was the place for students of history, thanks to the Historical Institute in Vienna, as well as those learning German or studying to become doctors and lawyers. Berlin mainly welcomed those interested in the natural sciences and engineering. Rome remained a functioning seminary for Catholic priests and for church and art historians, as well as practitioners and students of the fine arts.²³

Each was led by an esteemed academic professional who could and did more to earn the appreciation for “the name of Hungary” than “simple political tools” could have achieved, Klebelsberg argued.²⁴ Antal Lábán in Vienna was an accomplished literary historian who published his *Ungarn in seiner Dichtung* in 1923.²⁵ Robert Gragger of Berlin’s Collegium Hungaricum was also a literary historian who discovered Hungary’s first written poem, “Ómagyar Mária-siralom,” which dated to the thirteenth century. He was the author of a number of books, such as *Molière első nyomai a magyar irodalomban* (The First Traces of Molière in Hungarian Literature) in 1909 and *Preussen, Weimar und die ungarische Krone* in 1923. He also launched two academic journals (*Ungarische Jahrbücher* and *Ungarische Bibliothek*) to publicize Hungarian history, art, and literature.²⁶ Hungarian culture in Rome was led by art historian Tibor Gerevich, an established scholar in his field, whose notable works included *Tracce di Michelangelo nella scuola di Francesco Francia* (Traces of Michelangelo in the School of Francesco Francia) in 1908, *A régi magyar művészet európai helyzete* (The European Place of Ancient Hungarian Art) in 1924, and *L’arte antica ungherese* (Old Hungarian Art) in 1930.²⁷ In addition to being experts in their fields, the directors of the various academic centers performed the role of modern cultural attachés.²⁸

These institutions were much more than just dormitories for scholarship holders. One of the aims of the Collegium Hungaricum system

²³ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 135.

²⁴ Klebelsberg, *Neonacionalizmus*, 25.

²⁵ Ágnes Kenyeres, ed., *Magyar életrajzi lexikon*, <http://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/index.html> (accessed July 22, 2010).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 131.

was to promote the historical accomplishments of Hungary, as well as the achievements of its arts and sciences. Historian Gábor Ujváry argues that propaganda was only a secondary goal of these institutions, for Klebelsberg strongly believed that for Hungary to ascend, it needed an educated elite of “European standard.”²⁹ However, I would suggest that Klebelsberg also viewed these places as the essential representatives of Hungarian culture abroad. In his 1927 speech during the parliamentary budget debate, he argued that it was not the goal of the Collegium Hungaricum to conduct some sort of “inferior propaganda.” The mission was to represent the “power of Hungarian culture and knowledge” abroad in order to convince Europe of the “injustice of Trianon.”³⁰ The Collegium Hungaricum system did not go unnoticed by foreign observers. Colonel John A. Baer, U.S. military attaché in Vienna, clearly understood its rationale:

Under its educational system, Hungary maintains in various foreign capitols [*sic*], organization called “colleges,” which are really centers for various Hungarian activities. According to the information obtainable the purpose of these centers is first to give advantage to gifted students by helping them to study in foreign universities, and second, to serve as a liaison point through the directors of these centers for maintaining contact with the leading intellectuals in the places where the centers are located. They are also used for dissemination of information concerning Hungary, which is termed in some quarters “propaganda.”³¹

Klebelsberg bombarded the government with requests for money until his death in 1932. When his successor, Bálint Hóman, took over the VKM, there were three institutions called Collegium Hungaricum (Vienna, Berlin, and Rome), a Hungarian-French University Information Institute in Paris, and five lectureships at institutions of higher education in Germany, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Poland.

²⁹ Klebelsberg quoted in Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 129.

³⁰ Klebelsberg in *Felsőházi napló*, 1927, vol. 1, 410.

³¹ National Archives at College Park (NACP), RG 59 (Internal Affairs 864) M1206, roll 6.

Despite Klebelsberg's untimely death, the governmental approach to the issue of academic representation remained unchanged. One of the reasons was that Hóman—trained historian and director of the Hungarian National Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár) and the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum)—was his collaborator and a trusted specialist in cultural diplomacy. Another reason was the unrelenting competition. A 1933 confidential report stated that the expansion of Hungarian culture abroad was not competitive with the similar undertakings of the successor states, especially in France. According to the report, Hungary could not compete with the influence of the Institut d'Études Slaves (Institute of Slavic Studies).³² Indeed, the Paris institute had been a center for Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, and, to a certain degree, Polish cultural activity since its establishment in 1919.³³ Contemporary Hungarian statistics suggested that in 1928, there were approximately 1,000 Romanian and 500–600 “Slav” students studying in France, while there were somewhere between 150–300 Hungarian students (and many of those from the former Hungarian territories).³⁴ While not entirely in agreement with all that Klebelsberg had done, Hóman represented the continuation of a policy that thrived between 1927 and 1932 and continued to grow until Hungary entered the war in 1941, and actually even after that. My calculation, based on the published official budget, indicates that the VKM *officially* received approximately 4,900,000 pengő (approx. \$859,600) between 1927 and 1940. Others, like Iván Nagy in his 1936 study, argue that between 1924 and 1935, the Hungarian government spent 8,175,000 pengő (\$1,400,000).³⁵ The discrepancy resulted from the fact that, in addition to official government support, there had been transactions with private and semi-private companies for financial support of the government programs, such as foreign scholarships.³⁶

³² MOL, K636, 672. doboz (June 20, 1933).

³³ Institut d'Études Slaves, <http://institut-etudes-slaves.fr/> (accessed June 6, 2015).

³⁴ Balázs Ablonczy, “A Párizsi Magyar Intézet kezdetei. Molnos Lipót igazgatósága (1927–1943),” in *Fehér Lovag: tanulmányok Csernus Sándor 65. születésnapjára*, ed. László Gálffy and János Sáringer (Szeged: Lazi Könyvkiadó; SZTE BTK Középkori Egyetemes Történeti Tanszék, 2015), 407.

³⁵ Quoted in Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 139.

³⁶ I thank Gábor Ujváry for pointing out this possibility.

Traditional diplomatic work also aided these efforts. Under Hóman, Hungary signed cultural and intellectual agreements of cooperation with Italy (1935), Poland (1935), Austria (1935), Estonia (1938), Finland (1938), Japan (1938 and 1940), Germany (1936 and 1940), and Bulgaria (1941).³⁷ These treaties guaranteed a place for Hungarian cultural representation abroad, as they regulated agreements on textbooks, student exchanges, and institutional representation.³⁸ By the time Hungary entered the war, the country had developed a remarkable network of sixty-four foreign cultural and academic institutions in fifteen different countries.³⁹

The Hungarian Reference Library in New York City

The Hungarian Reference Library in New York (hereafter: HRL) was one of these sixty-four institutions. The establishment and daily operation of the HRL mirrored the hopes, anxieties, successes, and failures of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy. The official opening of the HRL took place on April 20, 1938, even though it had operated since October 1937. It was the crowning achievement of Hungarian cultural diplomacy because since the early 1920s, diplomats and intellectuals alike urged the creation of an academic and cultural institute to counter the growth of Slavic studies in the United States.⁴⁰

From the 1920s to the mid-1930s, Hungary was in fact very meagerly represented in American academic circles. Pál Teleki used personal connections to secure two places for Hungarians at the Michigan Agricultural College at East Lansing (today Michigan State University) for the 1924/25 school year. Through the Institute of International Education in 1924 Hungary was represented by one single

³⁷ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 153.

³⁸ MOL, K66, 239. csomó III-6/2, Draft of German-Hungarian Cultural Agreement (October 10, 1934).

³⁹ Paikert, 64; and Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 155.

⁴⁰ One of the original ideas was to create a cultural institution and Hungarian (Finno-Ugric) lectureship within the organizational and institutional setting of Columbia University. See János Pelényi's letter to Lajos Walko. MOL, K66, 82. csomó, III-6 (March 30, 1927).

female student at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. In the 1925/26 school year, six female college students spent a year at Vassar, Radcliffe, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, and Teachers College of Columbia University. In 1927, thanks to John D. Rockefeller's International Education Board, three Hungarian students gained entrance, each with a one-year scholarship and \$1,200 yearly stipend, to U.S. universities.⁴¹ In 1930, Hungarian language and literature was taught at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (albeit entirely funded by the American Reformed Church), Columbia University, and briefly at the Central Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. At the same time, Czechoslovak language and literature courses were available in ten American institutions, while Romanian and Serbo-Croatian instruction was offered in two places of higher education.⁴²

Architects of the cultural-diplomatic campaign agreed that improving Hungary's cultural representation in the United States was essential to its success. Existing Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav cultural and political propaganda in the United States presented a problem for the Hungarian political elite, who reacted with a competitive—one could even say a combative—spirit, representative of the campaign generally. There were also the activities of left-leaning Hungarian intellectuals forced to leave Hungary after Horthy came to power. An internal memorandum named Oszkár Jászi as one whose actions were “harmful” to the government's goal of reconstructing the country's image abroad. The government's trepidation about “harmful” propaganda by Hungarians went so far that, as early as 1923, Rosika Schwimmer—a feminist and Hungary's first female ambassador during the Károlyi government of 1918—was followed and reported on during her exile in the United States.⁴³ Hungary's cultural presence in the United States also sought to nurture second-genera-

⁴¹ Zoltán Magyary, “Külföldi magyar tudományos intézetek és egyéb tudományos kapcsolataink,” in *A magyar tudománypolitika alapvetése*, ed. Zoltán Magyary (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1927), 467–68.

⁴² Arthur I. Andrews, “Front Matter,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 9, no. 25 (June 1930): ii–vii. The 1936 issue of the same journal offers nearly identical information.

⁴³ MOL, K67, 3. csomó, 1. tétel (December 11, 1923).

tion Hungarian-Americans' links to the old country.⁴⁴ Moreover, the architects of this cultural-diplomatic campaign preferred a scattershot approach in which no target was too small or insignificant. If the VKM and the KÜM worried about the way Hungarian literature was taught in Buenos Aires (and indeed, it was taught there), and the Hungarian consulate proudly noted that there was no official representation of the successor states' literature, surely they would want a Hungarian institute in the United States.⁴⁵ Finally, Hungarians never forgot that the U.S. Congress failed to ratify the Treaties of Paris, including that of Trianon, and the press and the general public were cautiously optimistic about the possibility of American support for Hungary's revisionist goal.

The Hungarian ambition to represent the country in academic and cultural circles was part of a broader trend in which the United States became a target of international cultural diplomacy. The idea of an "information library" came, perhaps not surprisingly, from Britain. American anxieties about propaganda and its effects began as soon as World War I ended. Many became conscious of the fact that during the war, British propaganda influenced—or, some even argued, manipulated—U.S. public opinion.⁴⁶ The word "propaganda" earned a negative connotation worldwide, or as one British Foreign Office official noted, had a "particularly bad odor," one that prompted his colleagues to eschew the use of the word altogether in favor of the word "publicity."⁴⁷ One of the ways Britain eased American fears was that the Foreign Office tried to be "extremely careful to avoid the appearance of propaganda, whether direct or indirect," states Philip M. Taylor.⁴⁸ A British ship cut the transatlantic cables between Germany and the United States as soon as the war started, giving Great Britain effective control over the flow of news and information coming from war-torn Europe to America.⁴⁹ The British Bureau of Information in New

⁴⁴ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 27, 1935).

⁴⁵ MOL, K66, 239. csomó III-6/a (September 18, 1934).

⁴⁶ Gary, *The Nervous Liberals*, 23.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection*, 5.

⁴⁸ Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection*, 68.

⁴⁹ Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 45.

York, created in April 1917, was one of the main weapons of wartime propaganda. Additional branches opened in San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. In order to provide less obtrusive propaganda, in 1920, the British Bureau of Information was “rechristened” the more neutral-sounding British Library of Information.⁵⁰ By the mid-1930s, the library, with its sixteen employees, had become the “semi-official arm” of British diplomacy, according to a Hungarian internal report written by József Szentkirályi (later known as Joseph St. Clair), deputy director of the HRL.⁵¹ The British example was soon followed by similar official and semi-official cultural centers and “information libraries” established by France (1925), Germany (1925 and 1939), Italy (1938), and Japan (1934).⁵² Other “information centers” (as a 1937 study by the American National Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation designated them) included the Japanese Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, the China Institute, and the American-Russian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union.⁵³ The latter, despite its supposed “non-political character,” was in “close contact” with the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Nations. The American-Russian Institute maintained a reference library and information center, published a monthly paper, *Research Bulletin on the Soviet Union*, which “contain[ed] a summary of news events having to do with foreign, domestic, and cultural happenings in the USSR, and list[ed] current books and pamphlets which ha[d] to do with the Soviet Union.” In addition, the institute, since its creation in 1926, sponsored meetings, dinners, lectures, and exhibitions.⁵⁴ “Educating public opinion” in the United States was by no means a uniquely Hungarian undertaking.

The HRL began as a simple library based on the collection of Károly (Charles) Feleky. In 1924 he told Hungarian reporter Árpád

⁵⁰ Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection*, 70.

⁵¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó [1939?].

⁵² Ibid. For the planned Japanese Information Library, see “Japan in Amity Move,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1934, 10.

⁵³ Edith E. Ware, ed., *The Study of International Relations in the United States: Survey for 1937* (New York: published for the American National Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation by Columbia University Press, 1938), 268, 270, and 422.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 423.

Pásztor: “It was my dream that the Hungarian government build a Hungarian House in New York, place my library in it, and name me librarian.”⁵⁵ Charles Feleky was born in Budapest and arrived in the New World in 1885. At first he worked as a nightclub pianist, his first step in the American music scene. Not long afterward, he was conducting theater orchestras and touring extensively. During one of his trips, he acquired the original pieces of his English-language Hungarica collection, which by 1924 grew to 5,500 books and over 100,000 articles and magazine clippings (by 1930 the collection increased by another 2,000–3,000 volumes).⁵⁶ His New York apartment was a “Mecca for students of Hungarian and central European affairs,” as Stephen Duggan, director of the Institute of International Education, described it years later.⁵⁷ Feleky did not live to see his dream fulfilled. He died on October 4, 1930, and left an incredible collection, the result of a lifetime of work and \$32,000.⁵⁸ His brilliant collection did not disappear with him, for it was well-known in Hungarian intellectual circles and became the nucleus of the HRL.⁵⁹

Géza Paikert explained that the government’s ambition was to create the HRL as a “house of Hungarian culture,” the nucleus of a “giant” scholarly center, which over time would develop into a publishing house and a hub to serve the “Hungarian cause”—an often-used euphemism signaling revisionist goals—in every “nook and cranny” of

⁵⁵ Quoted in Kenneth E. Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection and Its Acquisition by the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: European Division of the Library of Congress, 1995), vvii. The quote originally appeared in Árpád Pásztor, “Feleky Károly és könyvtára,” *Pesti Napló*, February 27, 1938.

⁵⁶ Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection*, 1–4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁹ One of the people who visited the Feleky collection was Vilmos Fraknói—the same man who dreamed up the Hungarian Historical Institute (*Magyar Történeti Intézet*) in Rome. He published an article about Feleky’s growing collection in the journal *Magyar Könyvszemle* in 1912. It is perhaps ironic that sixty-six years later, in the same journal, Tamás Rónai sadly noted that his piece about the HRL was also intended to be a salute to the memory of Feleky, whose name was entirely missing from the Hungarian lexicons. Unfortunately, today the Hungarian Biographical Lexicon (*Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*)—at least its online version—still omits his name.

the United States.⁶⁰ The first step toward this goal was a meeting in February 1936 where Pál Teleki, János Pelényi (Hungarian envoy to the United States), György Ghika (chief consular officer, later envoy to the United States), Ferenc (Francis) Deák (law professor at Columbia University), and the aforementioned Stephen Duggan (who, in addition to being the director of the Institute of International Education, was also the president of the Hungarian-American Society) met to discuss the basic structure of the future HRL. Teleki's note makes it clear that they considered various institutional arrangements. One was to establish the Hungarian library in association with Columbia University, similar to the arrangement of the Deutsches Haus and the Italian Library. They decided against this because they feared the library would fall under university control. They discussed having the future library be closely associated with the Hungarian-American Society or with the Hungarian embassy itself but decided that, while the library should be connected with both, it should have its own building. They toyed with the idea of housing the library with the Hungarian Travel Bureau, but then decided against the plan, to avoid the possible "taste of propaganda." In the same meeting they also discussed the library budget, which they set at \$6,000 per year. The last agenda item was the selection of a director. They agreed that this post should not be filled by a professor, for a professor would not commit to the position for the duration desired and, once again, it might seem like a propaganda effort.⁶¹ By this time, informal negotiations between Antoinette Feleky, the widow of Károly Feleky, and the Hungarian government, represented by László Telkes and János Pelényi, were well underway.

The VKM section of "Foreign Cultural Relations" officially authorized Pelényi to start talks with Feleky's widow about purchasing the collection. The ministry was willing to spend between \$14,000 and \$16,000 on the collection.⁶² At the same time a revealing telegram arrived at the VKM from Chief Consul Ghika, stating that in "agreement with the envoy, it is their opinion that for very deliberate reasons, it would be surely desirable that the designated buyer of the Feleky

⁶⁰ Paikert, quoted in Tamás Rónai, "A New York-i Magyar Tájékoztató Könyvtár történetéhez," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 89, no. 1 (1978): 84.

⁶¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (February 1936).

⁶² MOL, K639, 5. csomó (November 16, 1936).

collection should not be the government.”⁶³ What “for very deliberate reasons” (*jólmegfontolt okokból*) actually means one can only speculate. However, knowing the government’s fear of being seen as conducting propaganda, one might reasonably assume that Ghika was addressing this concern. The reply from the KÜM designating the Hungarian National Museum as the buyer seems to make this conjecture even more plausible.⁶⁴ The Feleky Collection was acquired in April 1937. After some tense negotiations, the government paid, from the VKM’s budget, \$10,000 up front and committed itself to paying an additional \$6,000 over a ten-year period.⁶⁵ The government rented a seven-room office on the third floor of the Berkeley Building (19 West 44th Street), within walking distance of the New York Public Library and other landmarks. The rent was \$1,200 a year.⁶⁶ The HRL was ready to join the cultural and intellectual circles of New York. Telkes, by then the director of the library, drafted a plan for the first year:

- 1) Provide up-to-date information about all questions related to Hungary and the Danube basin.
- 2) Maintain old connections and develop new contacts with American publishing companies, including, but not limited to, printed media.
- 3) Keep a watchful eye on all English-language publications related to the region.
- 4) Provide aid to Hungarian and American scholars working on the region and attempt to establish student and teacher exchange programs.
- 5) Organize and support Hungarian exhibits and other cultural events.
- 6) Broadcast Hungarian-related programming via radio.
- 7) Organize book clubs and film screenings.⁶⁷

⁶³ MOL, K106, 64. csomó, 24. tétel, Washington-i Nagykövetség (December 23, 1936).

⁶⁴ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 29, 1936).

⁶⁵ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 6, 1937). Also in Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection*, 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ MOL, K106, 64. csomó, 24. tétel (July 19, 1937).

The main goal was, as Telkes put it, to “avoid even the appearance of political, religious, or other similar propaganda . . . with the hope that with strictly scholarly, objective, and earnest work,” the introduction of Hungarian culture to the American public would be possible.⁶⁸

It was in accordance with these guidelines that the HRL, led by the talented Telkes, became a cornerstone of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Unlike the Collegium Hungaricum institutions, whose dual task was to aid the development of the country’s future elite and to represent Hungarian culture, the information library’s main goal was to propagate Hungarian culture. In Telkes the library had an energetic and capable director. Born in 1902 in Budapest, he earned his PhD at Budapest University in law and political science. After practicing law in Budapest for some years, in 1930 he moved to the United States, earned a degree at Harvard Law School, and worked as a researcher on international law. Later he lectured on comparative private law, while organizing the Hungarian collection of the Harvard law library.⁶⁹

Telkes’s first assignment was to legitimize the HRL as a cultural institution. The idea of creating an advisory board containing influential U.S. citizens whose moral support and intellectual gravitas would lend weight to the HRL was put forward by Telkes as early as July 1937⁷⁰ and again by Géza Paikert in January 1938.⁷¹ Four months later, when the institution opened, the Advisory Council was in place. Membership was a significant issue. Telkes and Paikert discussed the unequivocal influence of scholars on the formulation of public opinion and on policymakers.⁷² In light of their conversation, the following list of intellectuals on the HRL’s Advisory Council is even more impressive, even if most of them did little more than lend their name to the organization, thus providing a level of legitimacy. Among its members were Edwin M. Borchard (professor of law at Yale University), Nicholas Murray Butler (president of Columbia University), Isaiah Bowman

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Library of Congress (European Division), *Materials for an American-Hungarian Lexicon: The Biographical Files of the Hungarian Reference Library, 1937–1942*, ed. Kenneth E. Nyirady. Microfilm: 93/991 MicRR.

⁷⁰ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 6, 1937).

⁷¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 25, 1938).

⁷² MOL, K639, 5. csomó (November 15, 1939).

(American geographer and one of the chief advisors to President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, one of the directors of the Council of Foreign Relations, and president of Johns Hopkins University), Joseph P. Chamberlain (professor of law at Columbia), the aforementioned Stephen Duggan, Robert M. Haig (professor of economics at Columbia), Manley O. Hudson (professor and chair of international law at Harvard University), Eldon R. James (director of Harvard Law Library), Philip C. Jessup (professor of international law at Columbia), Roswell Magill (professor of law at Columbia), Ernest M. Patterson (professor of economics at the University of Pennsylvania and the president of the American Academy of Political and Social Science), Lindsay Rogers (professor of public law at Columbia), and James T. Shotwell (professor of history of international relations at Columbia, member of the Inquiry, and director of the Division of Economics and History at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). This remarkable collection clearly illustrates that the relationship between academics, public opinion, and policy was not lost on Hungarians.

Telkes hit the ground running. Between August 1 and December 15, 1937, he mailed 1,691 letters and 3,375 cards advertising the forthcoming opening of the library. According to his report, the HRL had 1,452 visitors between October and mid-December of the same year.⁷³ He planned to send 10,000 pieces of correspondence to spread news about the HRL. Among the first visitors was Jupiter Doycheff, the Bulgarian chief consul in New York, who not only donated relevant books but stated that he would advise Sofia to establish a similar institution in the near future. Both the consulate and Budapest were satisfied with Telkes's efforts. János Pelényi wrote to the VKM that the only criticism he could make was that "*la mariée est trop belle*" ("the bride is too beautiful"), referring to the unanticipated momentum and the early success of the HRL.⁷⁴

The official opening took place on April 20, 1938. Actually, there were two openings: a formal one for the cultural and political elite, and another for the general public. The formal opening included welcoming

⁷³ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 15, 1937).

⁷⁴ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1937).

speeches by Pelényi, John H. Finley (editor of the *New York Times*), Stephen Duggan, and Harry M. Lydenberg (director of the New York Public Library), accompanied by the music of Ernő Dohnányi. The general opening included a small concert where Hungarians and Hungarian-Americans performed music by Béla Bartók, Ferenc Liszt, and Tchaikovsky, as well as songs from operettas by Imre Kálmán and traditional folk songs. The official brochure stated that “Hungary has been one of the centers of the diplomatic, economic, scientific and artistic activities of Central Europe for centuries. There has hardly been a problem, [*sic*] arising in the Danubian basin which might not likewise be considered as a typical Hungarian issue. Hence, the books of the Hungarian Reference Library pertain not only to Hungary, but to the Danubian Basin and Central Europe as well.”⁷⁵ It further stated that for students interested in Hungary, the HRL represented “a virgin field of dissertation research.” For “contributors to periodicals, authors and editorial writers,” the library offered not only “excellent facilities” but also a place of “authoritative information” free of charge.⁷⁶ Under “special activities,” the pamphlet pointed out that there were to be “weekly lectures on timely topics” and that “by means of special exhibits and concerts, the art and music of Hungary” was to be represented.⁷⁷ The *New York Times* quoted Pelényi as saying that the HRL was to be “an important bond between the cultural lives of Hungary and the United States” and was not designed to be a “propaganda organization.”⁷⁸ In actuality, the HRL was most certainly a propaganda organization, but different from the propaganda of the Great War. In the Hungarian Reference Library propaganda was cleverly disguised as culture and education, in accordance with the practice and understanding of contemporary cultural diplomacy.

By 1938 the government’s goal of establishing and maintaining its cultural presence in the United States gained greater urgency, given the changing international situation. Though Hungary’s traditional diplomacy was ever more oriented toward Germany alone, its cultural diplomacy remained more universal in scope and continued (and one

⁷⁵ Official brochure. MOL, K639, 5. csomó (1938).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Hungarian Library Opens,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1938, 15.

could argue, even increased) its outreach to Western powers. This time, however, the goals changed slightly. On the one hand, cultural propaganda aimed to convince the Western powers that the Vienna Awards were just. Yet Hungarians were facing serious competition from their neighbors. An internal memo entitled "Counter-Balancing Czech Propaganda in America" called for greater representation of Hungary through all available outlets.⁷⁹ Another confidential consular report emphasized the role and influence of Edvard Beneš, who became a visiting professor at the University of Chicago.⁸⁰ The Romanian government also reorganized its propaganda. On October 3, 1939, Romania established its own Ministry of Propaganda.⁸¹ At the same time, the Bucharest Foreign Ministry instructed the Romanian embassy staff in Washington to launch a campaign to counter Hungarian propaganda in the United States.⁸² Prime Minister Ion Antonescu proclaimed "propaganda to be 'a new army' upon which 'the future of the state depended.'"⁸³ Hungarian fears were fueled by rumors that the Romanian government had budgeted one million dollars for the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair. The entrance of the Romanian pavilion was decorated with a sign stating: "Roumania has over 20,000,000 people completely united in language, tradition and culture." Consul Popovici reportedly promised that the pavilion was only the beginning of Romania's new focus on propaganda in America, for his government was planning to establish a propaganda bureau to "present Romania to the Americans as they wanted and not the way the Hungarians like to see it."⁸⁴ To counter Romanian and Czechoslovak propaganda in, among other places, the United States, Pál Teleki in 1939 created a special section within the Office of the Prime Minister to conduct foreign propaganda. Its section leader, Domokos Szent-Iványi, was sent to the United States in 1938 to study the situation of Hungarian representa-

⁷⁹ MOL, K30, 4. csomó, B/38 tétel "Cseh kérdés" (October 25, 1939).

⁸⁰ MOL, K30, 4. csomó, B/38 tétel "Cseh kérdés" (September 22, 1939).

⁸¹ MOL, K30, 2. csomó, B/22 tétel (October 3, 1939). According to the same document, the overall budget of the propaganda organ for 1940/1941 was nearly 317.95 million lei.

⁸² Case, *Between States*, 51.

⁸³ Case, *Between States*, 49.

⁸⁴ MOL, K66, 471. csomó, III-6/2 (July 17, 1939).

tion. Upon his return, he argued that “especially in the light of recent developments,” he “found it unnecessary to stress the significance” of continuing Hungarian efforts in America.⁸⁵

Telkes and the HRL, with the strong backing of Budapest, worked vigorously to gain the support of the American public. He utilized all available outlets and personal connections to conduct cultural propaganda. Between November 1937 and March 1939, the HRL organized forty-seven lectures, exhibits, and concerts.⁸⁶ Telkes gave talks at the HRL, Yale, and Harvard on topics ranging from “1000 Years of Hungarian Culture” and “Hungarian Heroes of the American Revolution and of the Civil War” to “Hungary and Her Music.” Invited American specialists and professors also gave public lectures. A few representative titles included “A College Professor Sees Hungary” by Professor Clarence A. Manning of Columbia and “Hungary’s Place in Music History” by Marshall Bartholomew of Yale. Other talks were designed to boost Hungary as a tourist destination, such as “How to Get around on Little Money in Hungary.”⁸⁷

In January 1939, Telkes reported that the number of inquiries—by letter or phone or in person—was increasing significantly, up to one thousand per month, since the Munich Agreement put the region at the center of political commentaries.⁸⁸ Utilizing the upsurge of interest in things related to East-Central Europe, Telkes secured a contract with New York radio station WQXR to broadcast a half-hour of Hungarian music every Friday from 8:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. It included musical scores from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.⁸⁹ Using his personal connection to Olin Downes, music critic of the *New York Times*, who was responsible for the musical programming at the New York World’s Fair, Telkes successfully placed Hungarian music in the fair’s program. The HRL organized film screenings, and Telkes made a lucrative deal with the Hamburg-American Line to produce and show a short film about Hungary as a tourist destina-

⁸⁵ MOL, K63, 472. csomó, 75. tétel/2 (ND).

⁸⁶ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1938).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 15, 1939).

⁸⁹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 30, 1939).

tion during the ships' transatlantic voyages.⁹⁰ The same company also aided Telkes's effort to promote the International Summer University of Debrecen and its satellite campus in Keszthely, a picturesque little town on Lake Balaton. As a result of his efforts, there were 40,000 brochures promoting lectures on Hungarian culture, history, and language for potential study-abroad students.⁹¹ To be sure, students remained one of the main focuses of Hungarian efforts; many times it was argued that cultural propaganda should be a long-term commitment. Along with the HRL outreach campaign that targeted campuses nationwide, the VKM successfully negotiated a position for József Szentkirályi, deputy director of the HRL, to teach introductory Hungarian language and literature courses at Columbia.

Telkes and company seized every opportunity to put Hungary in the public eye. He convinced a greeting-card publisher to print 200,000 Christmas cards with a wintry scene depicting the Hungarian Parliament and the Danube with the caption "Christmas on the Beautiful Blue Danube of Budapest"—free of charge.⁹² When the country was celebrating its "National Protestant Day," the Hungarian Royal Postal Service issued a series of five stamps commemorating the country's Protestant heritage. This was an opportunity to educate the American public about Hungary's Protestant past. Swiftly he and his staff composed an English-language information guide to the stamps, made copies of them, and sent them to newspapers and magazines.⁹³ It was a rather successful campaign, as over thirty newspapers and magazines took note of the stamps and the event. One of the newspapers that picked up the story was the *New York Times*, which published an article about Hungarian students Péter Meliusz Juhász and Mátyás Dévai Bíró, who had studied in Wittenberg and were among the first religious reformers in Hungary; Gáspár Károli, who first translated the Bible into Hungarian in 1590; Albert Szenczi Molnár, who translated the Psalms into Hungarian; Gábor Bethlen, who was a famous Hungarian prince of Transylvania and benefactor of Protestants; and Zsuzsanna

⁹⁰ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (July 11, 1938).

⁹¹ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (January 30, 1939).

⁹² MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1938).

⁹³ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (October 10, 1939).

Lórántffy, the first lady of Hungarian Protestantism.⁹⁴ The success of the HRL as a cultural outpost in the United States is simply remarkable, especially given its unremitting financial problems. Between 1937 and 1939, the Hungarian government budgeted \$605 per month to operate the HRL.⁹⁵ By comparison, the Italian Information Library reportedly worked with a budget of \$1,500 per month.⁹⁶

With the outbreak of World War II, Teleki and company sought to avoid the mistakes of the past and wanted to maintain some level of connection with countries on both sides, clearly hoping to be ready for all possible outcomes. This mentality was articulated in an internal memo that, while specifically discussing ongoing attempts to sway French public opinion, embodied the thinking of the inner circles around Teleki. Cultural diplomacy served as the country's exit strategy. The memorandum argued that "while the defeat of Germany in the war is highly unlikely," the continuation of the Hungarian Studies Center in France "is vital *in order to cultivate the ground for the peace negotiations that will come after the war.*"⁹⁷ Through cultural diplomacy, Hungarian political leadership, with Teleki at the helm, aimed to both maintain old relationships and forge new ones. Hungary, despite pulling increasingly toward Germany, was not about to burn its bridges to the other Great Powers. With this sort of support mechanism in place, the HRL continued to grow. Despite some discontent from certain intellectuals in Hungary, the government was very satisfied with the work of the HRL. Nothing illustrates their appreciation more than the government plan of 1941 that included the hiring of staff, enlargement of the library, the purchasing of additional books, and a new budget that called for nearly \$2,000 per month.⁹⁸ Hungarian cultural diplomacy was not to be outshone in the United States.

⁹⁴ See "Hungary Commemorates the First Protestant Day," *New York Times*, October 1, 1939, 152.

⁹⁵ MOL, K639, 5. csomó (December 31, 1937).

⁹⁶ "44 Agencies Added to Foreign List," *New York Times*, October 15, 1938, 9.

⁹⁷ MOL, K30, 1. csomó, B/9/c tétel (October 25, 1939). Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ MOL, K30, 5. csomó, B/56/e/2 tétel (February 4, 1941).

Academic Publishing and Lectures

The influence of words on public opinion cannot be overestimated. “The power that makes the trigger-finger hesitate, or obey, is more powerful than armed force. It controls it. The power is the Power of the Word: the Word of Persuasion—the Word of Command. Words are weapons. We must not despise words and the use of words. Words win wars.” Thus wrote World War I-veteran-turned-pacifist John Hargrave.⁹⁹ If words were bullets, then the weapons were books, journals, and newspapers. Behind these weapons were the shock troops of propaganda, scholars, and journalists.

To provide a full picture of the significance of scholarly publications, I want to revisit, build on, and expand upon the materials introduced in Chapter One. Here a more extended discussion of the role of R. W. Seton-Watson and his wartime journal *The New Europe* is necessary.¹⁰⁰ Of course, one scholar and one publication cannot determine the outcome of a propaganda war, though Hungarians often credited Seton-Watson with just that. But at the same time, the influence of such a publication should not be underestimated. Scholarly publications like *The New Europe* had the ability to sway public opinion and generate the desired emotional response without being overtly propagandistic. This phenomenon was perhaps best explained by one of the British peacemakers, Harold Nicolson. In his 1933 memoir of the peace negotiations, he candidly admitted having an emotional response to the studies presented in Seton-Watson’s journal. Nicolson confessed

⁹⁹ John Hargrave, *Propaganda, the Mightiest Weapon of All: Words Win Wars* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1940), vi.

¹⁰⁰ There are surprisingly many detailed studies on the role of R. W. Seton-Watson. See László Péter, “R. W. Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Balance of Power,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 82, no. 3 (2004): 655–79; Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1981); Mark Cornwall, “Great Britain and the Splintering of Greater Hungary,” in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, ed. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004).

that after “long and fervent study” of the publication, he was “overwhelmingly imbued” with its interpretations of the current and historical realities of the region. As a result, he stated, “there was “bias” and “prejudice,” although he went on to explain that such reactions did not lead to any sort of “revengeful desire to subjugate or penalize” the former enemies.¹⁰¹

October 19, 1916, saw the publication of the first issue of *The New Europe*, a weekly review founded and financed by Seton-Watson. He and his collaborator Wickham Steed recruited an array of illustrious domestic and foreign scholars and politicians: Emile Boutrox (Académie Française), Ronald M. Burrows (King’s College, London), Jovan Cvijić (Belgrade University), Octavian Goga (Romanian Academy), Take Ionescu (Romanian minister without portfolio), Nicolae Iorga (Bucharest University), and Tomáš G. Masaryk (formerly professor at Prague University). According to its mission statement, the weekly was

devoted to the study of foreign politics and the problems raised by this war. Its foremost aim is to further and consolidate that entente cordiale of allied publicists, which must accompany the wider political entente, *if the Allies are to think and act in harmony, and to help forwards the formation of a sane and well-informed body of public opinion upon all subjects affecting the future of Europe*. . . . After our armies have won the war, our statesmen will have to win the peace, and their task will, indeed, be difficult, *unless public opinion is alert, organized and eager to support them* . . . our methods will be frankly critical and vigilant. . . . An integral victory such as alone can secure to Europe permanent peace . . . [and] *the emancipation of the subject races of central and south-eastern Europe from German and Magyar control*, such must be our answer to the Pangerman [*sic*] project of “Central Europe” and “Berlin-Bagdad.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919: Being Reminiscences of the Paris Peace Conference* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1933), 33.

¹⁰² “Mission Statement,” *The New Europe* 1, no. 1 (October 19, 1916–January 11, 1917): 1. Emphasis mine.

Seton-Watson and his colleagues made it clear that their aim was to shape public opinion. They wasted little time in creating the image of a belligerent Hungary. They not only wrote about the war-guilt question but also paid special attention to demolishing any lingering British sympathy toward Hungary. Because of the 1848 Revolution, the memory of Lajos Kossuth and the idea of liberal Hungary still had some traction—though not nearly as much as Hungarian leaders believed. Illustrating Hungary's responsibility for the war by placing Hungary squarely alongside Germany was one of the best ways to destroy any lingering positive sentiment toward Hungary. The contributors did not hesitate to their readership directly:

I think you, British reader, will be astonished. You, whose ideas about the Hungarian people were so high! You, in whose mind passes the heroic personality of the fighter for freedom, Lajòs [*sic*] Kossuth, whose memory is so popular in England! But, *quantum mutatus ab illo*! [How he changes from what he once was!] How little the Hungarians of the last decades resemble Kossuth. I think he would be ashamed of them if he had lived in present times. Hungary of to-day is not the classical country of freedom which exists in your imagination! Prussia and Hungary are the only two countries in Europe whose ideal is domination by force and by oppression of other people. Not in vain is Count Tisza [prime minister of Hungary during World War I] the best friend of Kaiser William and their sinister acts are closely connected in the responsibility of this war.¹⁰³

With a circulation of 5,000 copies a week, *The New Europe* continued until October 1920. The end of the war did not stop Seton-Watson and his collaborators from trying to convince the British public about the wretched character of the Hungarians. On the contrary, *The New Europe* warned against Hungarian propaganda, which, it claimed, was launched “with the intention of saving something of the illegitimate patrimony of the now defeated Magyar oligarchy for their successor,

¹⁰³ N. Lupu, “Roumania Irredenta,” *The New Europe* 5, no. 61 (December 13, 1917): 276.

the would-be democratic government of Hungary.”¹⁰⁴ It argued that while it might be true that public opinion was once quite so “gullible” that it could have been misled by “an astute propagandist,” the editors of the journal hoped and believed that this was no longer true, “and even the most sentimental British humanitarian has learned enough during the war to enable him to descry a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”¹⁰⁵ As peace talks began, Seton-Watson tightened the screws and, while continuing to warn against Hungarian propaganda, addressed the question of territorial settlement directly. From the “Magyar oligarchs who are pulling the wires in every Western capital,” wrote Seton-Watson,

it is impossible to expect an honest acceptance of the status quo . . . the Magyar aristocracy will never voluntarily renounce its dream of hegemony and will always seek allies for the reversal of present conditions. It has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and the peace of Europe demands that it [Hungary] should be reduced to complete and permanent impotence. Hungary has no future save as a mainly peasant community, content to live in peace with its neighbours and renounce its evil dream of racial hegemony.¹⁰⁶

The last edition of *The New Europe* appeared on October 28, 1920. By then Hungary had signed the Treaty of Trianon. Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia emerged as victors of the Great War. One might have thought that it was time for scholars to return to their ivory towers. However, exactly the opposite took place.

The experience of the war solidified the belief that international public opinion mattered and needed cultivation. One of the best ways to legitimize one’s very existence and to create meaningful relations with other nations was to address international circles directly. Historians and other scholars played an important role in creating a narrative that served the countries’ best interest abroad. In 1922 Seton-

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous, “Ware Magyar Propaganda,” *The New Europe* 9, no. 114 (December 19, 1918): 234.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁰⁶ R. W. Seton-Watson, “The Fall of Béla Kun,” *The New Europe* 12, no. 148 (August 14, 1919): 100.

Watson, in his expressively titled book *The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe*, explained that “finally the Great War brought home to the general consciousness the need for mutual interpretation between nation and nation, and at the same time the crying need for a basis of sound historical knowledge in the statesmen who settle the world’s affairs.”¹⁰⁷ He viewed history, especially that of Central Europe, as a discipline with a dual task. On the one hand, it was about “the scientific and critical treatment of historical subjects.” On the other, it belonged “to the field of practical politics.”¹⁰⁸ The political utility of scholarship was a lesson that Hungary’s neighbors recognized early on.

The wartime success left the Czechoslovak leadership assured that their cosmopolitan and enlightened interpretation of Czech history and culture was the correct choice to engage with intellectuals and politicians abroad. Subsequently, as Orzoff argues, “concerns with propaganda, information, and the press were central to their postwar vision.”¹⁰⁹ Masaryk and others sought and deliberately cultivated relationships with Western elites. Czechoslovaks understood that their country was vulnerable to its neighbors and their revisionist goals. More specifically, the elite hoped to convince Western powers to view their country as the keystone of European peace, in direct contrast to the Hungarian attitude that Czechoslovakia “serves to feed the germs of distrust and uncertainty throughout Central Europe . . . [for] in this way is [no] universal peace in Central Europe to be secured.”¹¹⁰ The importance attached to the positive portrayal of the country abroad can be illustrated by examining the institutionalization of these efforts and the narrative that was constructed.

The Third Section of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry was responsible for both domestic and foreign propaganda. Its primary task was to gather information and target Western public opinion. The cen-

¹⁰⁷ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Historian as a Political Force in Central Europe* (London: School of Slavonic Studies at the University of London, King’s College, 1922), 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 54–55.

¹¹⁰ *Central European Observer*, January 7, 1927, 20. For similar arguments, see Kamil Krofta, *The Substance of Hungarian Revisionism* (Prague: Orbis, 1934); and Emanuel Moravec, *The Strategic Importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe* (Prague: Orbis, 1936).

terpiece of Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy was the “Czechoslovak modern national myth.” According to this myth, Czechoslovakia was rescued from the repression of Habsburg German-speakers, and after 1918, the new state emerged and “made itself an island of democratic values, rationalism, and fair-mindedness” in the troubled region of East Central Europe.¹¹¹ Through the state-owned publishing house Orbis, the Third Section published academic journals and weeklies such as the French-language *L’Europe centrale*, the German-language *Prager Presse*, and the English-language *Central European Observer* to propagate this message.¹¹² In addition, it invited and entertained influential foreigners, oversaw radio and film production, and became involved in newspaper publishing as well as directly supporting—morally and financially—foreign journalists, correspondents, and academics. According to Andrea Orzoff, the Third Section had twenty-six French newspapers, press agencies, and radio agencies on its payroll. It is estimated that in 1933 alone, Czechoslovakia spent eighteen million French francs on international propaganda. The Third Section was indeed “paying for positive opinion.”¹¹³

The Romanian political and intellectual elite also appreciated the power of scholarly propaganda. After World War I, Romania’s newly acquired frontiers became the target of three different revisionist campaigns.¹¹⁴ It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that if the leitmotif of Hungary’s diplomatic effort was to revise the Versailles system, then Romania’s was to maintain it. On this issue all the warring factions of Romanian political life, with the exception of the Communists, agreed.¹¹⁵

Under the direction of Nicolae Titulescu, until 1936, the country’s foreign policy, described by one British foreign officer as a “very much a one man show,” promoted the idea that Romania’s territorial integrity

¹¹¹ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 11.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 70–71.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 145–47.

¹¹⁴ Hungarians sought to reclaim Transylvania and the Banat; the Soviet Union had its eyes on Bessarabia; Bulgaria looked toward its lost territory of Dobrudja.

¹¹⁵ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 50–54 and 426.

was the key to future peace and stability not only in the region but in Europe as a whole.¹¹⁶ To sway public opinion, Titulescu employed every weapon in his wide-ranging arsenal, which he successfully deployed during the Paris Peace Conference and continued to use thereafter. His government showed its appreciation to those who worked tirelessly to create a positive atmosphere around Romania. For example, the Romanian Parliament ceremonially rewarded and honored Seton-Watson for his work.¹¹⁷ He maintained personal relationships with Western political and public figures, as well as journalists, both at home and abroad, and scholars whom he “subsidized” from a “secret fund of the Foreign Ministry.” Seton-Watson was among those who received regular payments from the Romanian government.¹¹⁸

Soon after its first issue came out in May 1934, the *Revue de Transylvanie* became one of the most important Romanian conduits to the West. This French-language journal was published by ASTRA (the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People). Historian Paul E. Michelson argues that the journal was an example of an activity he calls “militant scholarly patriotism.”¹¹⁹ The creator and director of the journal was Silviu Dragomir, professor of history at the University of Cluj and, rather tellingly, a one-time deputy of the Romanian Parliament and later a member of the Goga-Cuza government. He was one of the leading contributors to Romanian efforts to counter Hungarian revisionist propaganda and, as such, the ideal candidate to direct the journal. The journal was published until 1944 and, as Michelson put it, “poured forth some 3600 pages explaining, defending, and promoting a Romanian perspective on issues related to Transylvania.”¹²⁰ Perhaps not surprisingly, one of

¹¹⁶ Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 1–15.

¹¹⁷ “The Romanian Parliament Honours Scotus Viator [pen name of Seton-Watson]: Speech given by Octavian Goga on June 19, 1920,” *The New Europe* 16, no. 196 (July 15, 1920): 24.

¹¹⁸ Lungu, 15–16. On Seton-Watson’s honorarium, see Case, *Between States*, 40.

¹¹⁹ Paul E. Michelson, “Silviu Dragomir, The Historian-Militant and the *Revue de Transylvanie*” (unpublished manuscript). I would like to thank Professor Michelson for sharing his manuscript with me.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Dragomir's first polemics aimed to discredit István Bethlen and his writings and lectures on behalf of the cause of Hungarian revisionism.¹²¹ Even as traditional diplomacy turned toward Germany, mainly to counter Hungary, the journal continued to publish scholarly articles and propaganda pieces in a scholarly camouflage. The "Transylvanian Question," as Holly Case illustrates, remained the source of tension, as intellectuals—both Romanian and Hungarian—continued to produce historical, ethnographic, and anthropological studies with maps and statistics to legitimize their claim to the region.¹²²

Unlike their Czech and Romanian counterparts, Hungarian diplomats and scholars had little or no experience with cultural propaganda. In the beginning, while the Hungarian political elite was setting up the basic organs of the government, private groups took on the challenge of cultural propaganda. The situation was made more difficult by the country's diplomatic isolation. To appease the Western powers and secure much-needed loans, the Hungarian government *officially* shelved the question of territorial revision. For example, by order of the KÜM, territories lost to Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Austria could not be referred to as "occupied territories" (*megszállott területek*). The reasoning behind the decree was that any expressions or terms that might suggest that Hungary did not recognize the Treaty of Trianon would harm the country's international relations.¹²³ Nevertheless, the government did pay for propaganda. In a strictly unofficial capacity, the KÜM and the VKM financially supported various non-governmental and private agencies and societies. According to an unwritten agreement on the division of labor, the government conducted no official propaganda, while various societies, emphasizing their non-affiliation with official government organs, produced the majority of cultural and political propaganda.¹²⁴ Bethlen's government was indeed very

¹²¹ Silviu Dragomir, "Les deux attitudes du comte Bethlen. L'impérialisme hongrois," *Revue de Transylvanie* 1, no. 1 (1934): 5–31. See also Professor Michelson's manuscript.

¹²² See Holly Case, *Between States*, 48–66.

¹²³ MOL, K59, 13. tétel (September 3, 1920). Reproduced in Pál Pritz, *Iratok a magyar külügyi szolgálat történetéhez, 1918–1945* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1994), 428. The message was reiterated a year later. See Pritz, *Iratok*, 429.

¹²⁴ Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között* (Budapest: Magyar Történeti Társulat, 1995), 235.

worried about accusations of propaganda, charges against which it was not always easy to defend. An exchange in Parliament between deputy József Pakots and Bethlen illustrates very well that not everyone agreed with this policy. Pakots challenged Bethlen about the lack of KÜM involvement in Hungary's revisionist propaganda. Bethlen retorted that the various organs of the KÜM were not designed to conduct propaganda. Furthermore, continued the prime minister, if the organs of the KÜM involved themselves with propaganda, they would end up "discrediting and compromising" the Hungarian diplomatic corps in the eyes of foreign governments.¹²⁵ In this way the government washed its hands of all aggressive revisionist propaganda, which, though it supported, it did not organize. Occasionally the government still found itself deeply embarrassed by the conduct of various irredentist groups and revisionist organizations.

One of the most prolific non-governmental organizations was the TEVÉL, which was established in November 1918 and, except under the Béla Kun regime, operated until May 1921, when the government suspended it. During this period, TEVÉL published no less than 440,000 items of propaganda in French and English.¹²⁶ Foreign Minister Miklós Bánffy argued that the organization not only incited Hungarians, especially youth, in the successor states but also created a dangerous international climate. The government unsuccessfully attempted to coordinate the activities of the various groups under the umbrella of the Társadalmi Egyesületek Szervezetének Központja (TESZK—Central Organization of Social Groups) directed by Pál Teleki.¹²⁷

Two of the best-organized government-supported organizations were the Magyar Külügyi Társaság (MKT—Hungarian Society for Foreign Affairs, founded in 1920) and the Magyar Revíziós Liga (MRL—Hungarian Revisionist League, founded in 1927). Both aimed to create propaganda on a scientific basis. Unlike their far-Right and counter-revolutionary predecessors, these organizations clearly enjoyed moral and unofficial financial support from the government. The MKT

¹²⁵ *Az 1927. évi január hó 25-ére hirdetett Országgyűlés Képviselő Házának Naplója*, vol. 17, 329. The exchange took place during Session No. 249 on February 6, 1929.

¹²⁶ Zeidler, *A Revíziós gondolat*, 106–8.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

at home aimed to educate Hungarians about the art of foreign policy-making. Abroad, it tried to impress upon foreign audiences the worthiness and legitimacy of Hungary as a European country. The MKT mission statement reads: “the members of the Hungarian nation must be prepared for a campaign of conquest [*hódító hadjárat*], and it will be the difficult undertaking of Hungarian society to put the necessary arms in the hands of the warriors of this campaign, whose duty will be the winning of minds and hearts of the various nations, because the order of today [and tomorrow] will be based on the minds and hearts of nations.”¹²⁸ In order to accomplish the ultimate goal of the society—to “secure the place of the Hungarian nation [among the company of free nations] that is its due thanks to its thousand-year-old traditions and to its role in safeguarding Western civilization and establishing and protecting Western culture in the Carpathian Basin”¹²⁹—the MKT worked closely with, but nominally independently of, the KÜM, in representing the interests of Hungarian foreign policy at home and abroad. The Magyar Revíziós Liga took on the actual propaganda work both at home and abroad. While closely connected with the government, the MRL was an umbrella organization of thirty-five societies and associations.¹³⁰ The two organizations, but especially the MRL, published numerous essays and studies and sponsored and organized lecture tours, but Bethlen and company felt the need for more and better scholarly propaganda.

The challenge of publishing quality scholarly publications was the impetus for the establishment of the Magyar Szemle Társaság (MSZT—Society of the Hungarian Review). The society, with close official and semi-official governmental ties, was established in 1927. Nothing is more telling of the significance attached to the success of this society than the fact that Bethlen was its president. The most prominent Hungarian historian of the era, Gyula Szekfű, edited *Magyar Szemle*, the society’s journal. The society and journal has been accused of being little more than the mouthpiece of the government, an accusation not without foundation. Among the board members were some of the best-known figures of Hungary’s political and intellectual

¹²⁸ “A Magyar Külügyi Társaság megalakulása,” *Külügyi Szemle* 1, nos. 1–2 (July–October 1920): 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁰ Zeidler, *A Revíziós gondolat*, 127.

elite. This conservative group included Bálint Hóman, Gyula Kornis, Gusztáv Gratz (historian and deputy at the Hungarian Parliament), Ferenc Herczeg (novelist and president of the MRL), and Benedek Jancsó (historian, literary scholar, and an expert on Romania). These were just a few who contributed to the success of this monthly journal, which, according to estimates, had over 3,500 subscribers.¹³¹

Hungary's only foreign-language scholarly journal was the *Ungarische Jahrbücher*, and the society was clearly aware that Hungary needed to target the intellectual elite of France and the English-speaking countries as well. They were especially impressed by the perceived success of Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy and pointed to the publications of *Orbis* with a mixture of admiration and jealousy.¹³² Others, such as Elemér Radisics, pointed out that it was pointless and absolutely unnecessary to publish propaganda in Hungarian, for there was no need to convince Hungarians of the injustices of the status quo.¹³³ Furthermore, Radisics argued, it was not enough to translate (mostly badly) Hungarian publications; one had to provide facts in an objective yet enjoyable fashion. He urged his countrymen to follow the advice of Sir Campbell Stuart and pay the utmost attention to the psyche of the propaganda's target group as well as to the psyche of the opponents.¹³⁴ By the early 1930s, Hungarian publications for foreign audiences began to appear in all the major Western capitals.

The *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* and the *Hungarian Quarterly* were the crowning achievements of these efforts to present the Hungarian

¹³¹ Mihály Zichy, "Adalékok a Magyar Szemle történetéhez," *Magyar Szemle* 6, no. 6 (December 1997), http://www.magyarszemle.hu/szamok/1997/6/adalekok_a_magyarszemle_tortenetehez (accessed August 27, 2010). For more on the history of the journal, see Matthew Caples, "Et in Hungaria Ego: Trianon, Revisionism, and the Journal *Magyar Szemle* (1927–1944)," *Hungarian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005), <http://epa.oszk.hu/01400/01462/00033/pdf/051-104.pdf> (accessed August 27, 2010).

¹³² Endre Moravek, "Cseh propaganda," *Magyar Szemle* 9, no. 2 (34) (June 1930): 144–51.

¹³³ Elemér Radisics, "A magyar propaganda hibái," *Magyar Szemle* 9, no. 4 (36) (August 1930): 324–25.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Radisics most likely was referring to Sir Campbell Stuart's *Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920).

past and present to a foreign audience in a positive light. As early as 1923, Zoltán Baranyai, Hungarian representative at the League of Nations, called for an end to the publication of “pamphlet-like and occasional” French-language propaganda and called for scholarly, yet accessible, publications.¹³⁵ The *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, established in 1932 with the active support of Bethlen, was a successor to the prewar *Revue de Hongrie*. The NRH’s yearly budget was 66,000 pengő. Half came from the KÜM; the remainder was provided by other government organs, private individuals, and groups. After 1933 the French Foreign Ministry contributed to the costs of the journal’s publication.¹³⁶ Despite various governmental changes, the publication enjoyed the continuous financial and moral support of Hungarian governments until 1944. To legitimize it as a scholarly and objective publication rather than a propaganda tool, the editors György Ottlik and József Balogh recruited foreign authors to contribute, among them Nicholas M. Butler, Édouard Herriot, and Salvador de Madariaga.¹³⁷

On June 10, 1935, some of the most influential political, intellectual, and industrial leaders of the country gathered to address the burning need to launch an English-language journal and publish a new *History of Hungary*. The *Hungarian Quarterly* (HQ) was to address this need. Bethlen, who presided, justified the initiative:

The written informative work that we have conducted among the Anglo-Saxon nations in the past one-and-a-half decades was extremely deficient, and more than once, it was simply harmful. Instead of stylistically and grammatically accurate [*nyelvi formában biztos*], sober, and objective informative works, there have been hybrid and short-lived printed organs written in poor English. To replace these publications with a journal that is

¹³⁵ MOL, K67, 4. csomó, 1. tétel (March 10, 1924).

¹³⁶ Henri de Montety, “A Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie: a magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás tükré,” in *A magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században*, ed. Pál Pritz (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 179–80.

¹³⁷ Montety, 185. Henri de Montety tells the story of one of the failures of Balogh’s “outreach campaign.” Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, a young French publicist, was winned and dined in Hungary for weeks, but all the editors secured in return was an article calling for a Danubian Confederation, an idea that pleased them very little.

edited with integrity, written with excellent English, presented in an appealing way, and skillfully disseminated is a national interest of the highest order [*elsőrendű*].¹³⁸

Those present at the meeting included (in alphabetical order): József Balogh, István Bethlen, Pál Biró (industrialist), Ferenc Chorin (industrialist), Prince György Festetich, Gusztáv Gratz, Count Béla Hadik, Béla Imrédy (president-director of the Hungarian National Bank, later minister of finance and prime minister), Baron Móric Kornfeld (industrialist and politician), Gyula Kornis, Zoltán Magyary, Bishop László Ravasz (prominent leader of the Reformed Church and member of Parliament), Zsombor Szász (diplomat and publicist), Gyula Szekfű, Pál Teleki, Lajos Walkó (minister of commerce and later minister of foreign affairs), and Count István Zichy (historian and head of the Hungarian History Museum).¹³⁹ If some of the names seem familiar, this is no accident. Official, or rather semi-official, cultural diplomacy was the work of a small group of influential people, leaders of Hungarian political, intellectual, and economic life. The close cooperation of these people made the HQ possible.¹⁴⁰ The HQ was to have a 42,000-pengő annual budget. Bethlen solicited 40 percent of the funds by asking “national business circles”—the Hungarian National Bank, the Association of Savings Banks and Banks (*Takarékpénztárak és Bankok Egyesülete*), and the National Union of Manufacturers (*Gyáripárosok Országos Szövetsége*)—for monetary contributions. The remaining 60 percent came from the KÜM budget.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár (OSzKKt) (Hungarian National Széchényi Library manuscript division), József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525/13883. I thank Tibor Frank for pointing out this collection to me.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ On the organization of this group, see Tibor Frank, “Patronage and Networking: The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly, 1935–1944,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 50, no. 196 (2009): 3–12.

¹⁴¹ Tibor Frank, “Editing as Politics: József Balogh and the *Hungarian Quarterly*,” in *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making: Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America, 1848–1945* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999), 267. Frank also points out that on other occasions, Bethlen suggested that 60 percent of the necessary funds actually came from the leaders of Hungarian industry, commerce, and banking. Individuals such as Baroness Rothschild in England also contributed to the annual budget.

Once the necessary funds were obtained, the Society of the Hungarian Quarterly launched its campaign to legitimize the journal as a genuine scholarly periodical. Utilizing financial and personal connections, advisory boards were established in both England and the United States. Major Edward Owen Rutter, historian and novelist, was named HQ representative in London, receiving £200 per annum. In the United States, Francis Deák became the interim representative of the journal.¹⁴² Through various media, the HQ recruited influential Americans to serve on the U.S. advisory board, including George Creel and John F. Montgomery (U.S. ambassador in Budapest), most of whom would also serve on the HRL advisory board a few years later.¹⁴³ In addition, to counter any accusations of propaganda and government involvement, the HQ recruited Columbia University Press as the periodical's American agent. At Bethlen's personal invitation, Nicholas Murray Butler wrote the opening article in the first issue. From the beginning, Balogh, as the chief editor of the HQ, traveled to England to enlist influential Englishmen. He invited prospective contributors to Budapest, organized social functions in their honor, took them to the country estates of the Hungarian aristocracy, and arranged audiences with leading political figures. His efforts paid off, for he secured articles by some of the highest members of English society, including Lord Allen of Hurtwood, Sir Thomas Cuninghame, the Viscountess Snowden, Sir John Marriott, Admiral Mark Kerr, Sir Charles Petrie, Lord Stamp, H. W. V. Temperley, and Lord Gorell.¹⁴⁴

Bethlen and company also made sure that an internal monitoring system oversaw all domestic and foreign publications. At home, Bethlen made it clear that he did not want to see any competition to the HQ. The *Danubian News*, which was an MRL publication, presented a particular problem, since its "style" did not fit the ideals of official circles. Bethlen called for its discontinuation or, as he put it, "if for some unforeseen reason that were not possible," a complete change of its profile.¹⁴⁵ The KÜM and its special section were especially keen

¹⁴² OSzKKt, József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525/13887.

¹⁴³ For a study on Montgomery, see Tibor Frank, *Roosevelt követe Budapesten* (Budapest: Corvina, 2002).

¹⁴⁴ Frank, "Editing as Politics," 272.

¹⁴⁵ OSzKKt, József Balogh papers, Fond 1/1525 (January 4, 1936).

to monitor foreign publications relevant to the region.¹⁴⁶ They also made sure that the HQ's message was aligned with the wishes of the government. For example, HQ editor Balogh's letter to the KÜM indicates that topics needed government approval. Among the questions were 1) Can the idea of territorial revision based on historical justification be discussed? 2) To what degree is criticism of Germany and German policies allowed? 3) Should the question of Ruthenia, Ukraine, and Polish-Hungarian borders be debated? 4) Should the issue of nationalities in Hungary (especially that of Germans) be discussed? 5) How advisable is it to discuss the subject of cooperation between the small states of Eastern and Southeastern Europe?¹⁴⁷ After 1927, once Hungary openly admitted its "peaceful revisionism" campaign, the government did its utmost to design, control, and disseminate a positive image of the country. The only question that remained was what message it sought to propagate.¹⁴⁸

International recognition of Hungary's historical deeds was vital to legitimizing the country and its revisionist claims. All of the publications and lectures were designed to persuade educated foreign elites of Hungary's credentials as a European country, moreover, one whose contributions were fundamental to the development of Western civilization. In this appraisal of Hungarian history, there was no room for the pagan chieftain Árpád nor any discussion of a mythical bloodline between Magyars and Attila the Hun. The basic idea represented Hungary as the architect and guardian of European culture in the Carpathian Basin. Count Albert Apponyi summed up this idea:

¹⁴⁶ A small sample of books and publications reviewed by the special section and various KÜM organs—without even attempting to cover them all—gives an idea of the importance attached to foreign publications. The list includes works by Seton-Watson, Beneš, Nicolae Iorga, John D. E. Evans, H. G. Wells, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, Christopher Sidgwick, Frank H. Simonds, John O. Crane, and Philip Gibbs.

¹⁴⁷ OSzKKt, József Balogh papers, Fond 1/322/3229. The correspondence is dated January 1939. I could not locate a reply for the questions; it seems apparent that the increasing appeasement of Germany limited the discussion of some of these topics.

¹⁴⁸ It would be impossible to mention all the works published with government support; hence I limit my analysis to those I deem the best representatives of this "cottage industry."

The Hungarian nation had and has a lofty world-historic mission, determined by the achievement and tendencies of thousand years, in the fulfillment of which it has been obstructed and weakened by the catastrophe of Trianon. The mission was, and still is the defence and the peaceful extension of the higher standards of Western life, by political and military, as well as by cultural efforts, according to the requirements of the age. The Trianon mutilation has detached from the West territories it had already conquered, and thrown them back into semi-Oriental conditions, imperiling thereby existing Western cultures in these territories, and slackening the progress of those who do not yet possess such a culture, because they no longer feel the stimulus of its rival power. The mutilation of Hungary, the weakening of the Hungarian nation, is a loss to the great intellectual and moral interest of mankind, a loss without compensation.¹⁴⁹

The foundation of its cultural superiority, the argument ran, was a result of Hungary's millennium-long historical and cultural development. "Does it [Hungary] possess such qualities, can it point to such achievements, that it may be expected to offer some characteristic contribution to the moral and spiritual riches of humanity? Would humanity be poorer, were there no Hungarian nation? To these questions we may boldly and confidently reply in the affirmative," wrote Apponyi in 1928.¹⁵⁰

Hungary's "civilizing mission" remained a central theme of arguments made in journals and lecture halls. It sought to provide a universal meaning to Hungarian nationalist claims. Sándor Márai, novelist and public intellectual, explained the "civilizing mission" of Hungary and its place within Europe:

We believe that the sole historical means of subsistence for Magyars is for them to consciously accept and demand this

¹⁴⁹ Count Albert Apponyi, "The Historic Mission of Hungary and of the States Aggrandised to Her Detriment," in *Justice for Hungary: Review and Criticism of the Effect of the Treaty of Trianon* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 19–20.

¹⁵⁰ Apponyi, "The Historic Mission of Hungary," 7. Quoted as in the original.

leading cultural and economic role . . . the Magyar nation in Southeast Europe is the balancing force whose useful and beneficent effects no new power constellation can do without. . . . No one can deny that the Magyars have a calling, the supreme sense of which is that they should allow the free expression of talents and abilities of all nationalities that live here within the framework of the Hungarian state. . . . And just as it is an undeniable fact that Hungary was, for centuries, the eastern bastion of Western culture, so too is it undeniable that this Western Christian culture continues to radiate most shiningly in Southeast Europe, to the present day, within the boundaries of historical Hungary.¹⁵¹

Central to this argument was the Hungarians' supposedly unique ability to form an enduring political nation in the Carpathian Basin. Gyula Kornis addressed this issue on the pages of the HQ, arguing that Hungary's "mission" and *raison d'être* was to "bring about an advanced state of culture in the Danubian region." He explained that "no matter what our conception of culture and its components—religion, law, ethics, science, art—they can thrive only in proportion to the political and stateforming [*sic*] power of the nation in question." To him Hungarian legitimacy was rooted in the fact (a fact that was questioned by others) that "until the tenth century no race had been able to obtain a permanent footing" in the region. This was an achievement accomplished only by Hungarians, who "reorganized" the territory, "reclaimed" the "barren lands," and made it part of "civilized Europe," concluded Kornis.¹⁵²

Hungary's ties to Western Christianity were another dominant theme. Ferenc Eckhart, in his 1932 *A Short History of the Hungarian People*, emphasized the decision of St. Stephen to accept Roman (Catholic) Christianity instead of what he called the Eastern Church. The argument states that because of St. Stephen's religious policy, the con-

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Ignác Romsics, "From Christian Shield to EU Member," *Hungarian Quarterly* 48, no. 188 (2007): 22. Originally in a Márai pamphlet titled "Pamphlet on the Matter of National Education."

¹⁵² Julius [Gyula] Kornis, "Hungary's Place in History," *Hungarian Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1936): 45–46.

version, admittedly “achieved largely by force and not by persuasion,” saved Hungary from the fate of becoming “Slavic.”¹⁵³

Klebensberg understood early on the significance of finding usable historical episodes. In his letter to Szekfű, he pointed out his wish that Hungarian historians would examine and write the history of “Turkish peril.”¹⁵⁴ Bálint Hóman’s and Gyula Szekfű’s multivolume work, *Magyar történet* (Hungarian History), partly answered the call. In their works the Ottoman foe was vilified and the Hungarian nation was portrayed as a heroic victim. As Steven Béla Vardy notes, Szekfű “blamed the Turks not only for the economic plight and personal harassment of the population, not only for the country’s depopulation and for the general dislocation of Hungary’s historical evolution, but also for the destruction of the Hungarian soil, for the pollution of the Hungarian waters, and for the putrefaction of the Hungarian air.”¹⁵⁵ Szekfű did not mince words; he proclaimed that Hungary’s struggle against the Turks was simply “unprecedented in the history of mankind.”¹⁵⁶ The Hungarians, argued Szekfű, unlike the Romanians, Serbs, and Bulgarians, did not shrink from their Christian duties. Consequently, continued the author, the Hungarians’ fight for the “cause of Europe” was characterized by an unyielding attitude, constant preparedness, strong discipline, and martyr-like self-sacrifice—like Rome’s struggle against the barbarian hordes.¹⁵⁷ Szekfű’s and Hóman’s narrative of the Ottoman occupation and the story of victimization, along with the notions of Hungarian exceptionalism, became the main building blocks of interwar Hungarian self-identity as well as one of cultural diplomacy’s central themes.

¹⁵³ Ferenc Eckhart, *A Short History of The Hungarian People* (London: Grant Richards, 1931), 24–25. Eckhart’s work was published in both French and English, with both editions financed by the government.

¹⁵⁴ Klebensberg’s letter to Szekfű, February 23, 1921. G 628, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Egyetemi Könyvtár (ELTE University Library).

¹⁵⁵ Steven Bela Vardy, *Clio’s Art in Hungary and Hungarian America* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1985. Distributed by Columbia University Press), 150.

¹⁵⁶ Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet*, vol. 4 (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1928), <http://www.elib.hu/00900/00940/html/> (accessed December 15, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

According to this understanding, it was Hungary's "historical mission" to be the "defender of the West" and "the bulwark against tides of Orientals" and "to fight the Saracens for three centuries under the sign of the Cross."¹⁵⁸ Kornis and others, such as János Pelényi, offered the words of historians to illustrate their point about Hungary's status as the "shield of Christendom." In his speech at Columbia University, Pelényi quoted French historian Jules Michelet: "Europe can never repay Hungary for the service she rendered when she protected Europe against the Turks and Mongols. While Hungary erected dams against the barbarian invasions, arts could live and prosper in the West." In the same speech he also made reference to British historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, who supposedly said that "had it not been for Hungary's valiant defense of the cross against the Crescent it might well be that the Koran [Quran] and not the Bible would be taught in Oxford."¹⁵⁹ The KÜM ensured that all Hungary's diplomats could act as historians. Among the topics to be discussed was Hungary's role as the true "*scutum fidei*" (Shield of Faith), the Eastern bastion of Western Christianity.¹⁶⁰ A memorandum entitled "Guidelines for Contact with Americans" ("Írányelvek az amerikaikkal való érintkezésre") deemed the subject of "Hungary's historical role as the protector of Western culture and Christianity" an "effective" topic. The instruction cautioned diplomats to make audiences aware that "the reason Western European culture was able to develop in peace" was the "five-century-long" sacrifice of the Hungarian nation.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Kornis, "Hungary's Place in History," 47.

¹⁵⁹ Pelényi's speech was given at Columbia University's St. Stephen's Day celebration on November 18, 1938. MOL K 66, 376. csomó, II-6 (2). I must point out that I have been unable to locate the corresponding quotes in their original, but that has not stopped Hungarians from reproducing them in one way or another, even as recently as 2011. See Andrew L. Simon, *Made in Hungary: Hungarian Contributions to Universal Culture* (Simon Publications, 1999), 17; and the 2011 publication of the Hungarian Ministry of Defense: Lajos Gubcsi, ed., *1000–1100 Years Ago . . . Hungary in the Carpathian Basin* (Budapest: MoD Zrínyi Média Ltd, 2011), <http://mek.oszk.hu/09100/09132/09132.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ MOL, K67, 9. csomó, 3. tétel, 68. dosszié (undated).

¹⁶¹ MOL, K67, 1. csomó, 1. tétel (1920?).

The country's Ottoman legacy was also used as an explanation for the issue of demographics and ethnic composition of pre-Trianon Hungary.¹⁶² Prime Ministers Teleki and Bethlen both argued to audiences in Great Britain and the United States that as a consequence of the "inconceivable hardship and misery," Hungary was "depopulated and devastated."¹⁶³ However, Hungary's victimization story was not yet finished, for both argued that the end of Ottoman occupation brought not liberty but another conquest, this one by the Habsburgs, who resettled the depopulated parts of Hungary with foreigners. This "racial expropriation of Hungary by the Austrian Empire," maintained Teleki, forever changed the ethnic makeup of Hungary and led to the "modern claims of nationalities."¹⁶⁴ In this narrative of double victimization, one can find an interesting historiographical adjustment. By the 1920s, in certain circles—especially those connected with the foreign representation of Hungary's past—the *kuruc-labanc* dichotomy gave way to a historical image in which the country was a martyred, underappreciated, and misunderstood nation.¹⁶⁵

Hungarians were not the only ones claiming their Europeanness on the basis of historical deeds. Austrians, Poles, Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbs, and Croats—diplomats, historians, and artists—proclaimed their role in safeguarding the achievements of Western civilization. The Croatian narrative went even further and proclaimed a narrative of "triple victimization," in which Hungarians joined Ottomans and Habsburgs as oppressors.¹⁶⁶ Romanians illustrated their heroic deeds in the face

¹⁶² For more on the role of the Ottoman occupation in interwar cultural diplomacy, see Zsolt Nagy, "In Search of a Usable Past: The Legacy of the Ottoman Occupation in Interwar Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy," *Hungarian Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (2015): 27–49.

¹⁶³ Count Paul Teleki, *The Evolution of Hungary and Its Place in European History* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1923), 54–87; and Count Stephen Bethlen, *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), 19–56.

¹⁶⁴ Teleki, 84.

¹⁶⁵ For a recent study on the new perspectives of the *kuruc-labanc* debate, see Gergely Romsics, *Nép, nemzet, birodalom: A Habsburg Birodalom emlékezete a német, osztrák és magyar történetpolitikai gondolkodásban, 1918–1941* (Budapest: Ú.M.K., 2010), especially chap. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Patrick Hyder Patterson, "The Futile Crescent? Judging the Legacies of Ottoman Rule in Croatian History," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 128–29.

of the Ottoman menace, and in their telling, there was nobody more faithful to Christianity (more precisely, Orthodoxy) than the Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. He was memorialized in the Romanian section of the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. As the inscription in the room's spectacular mosaic states: "Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu and his family laid down their lives so that faith in God and nation may live forever in Romanian hearts." His sacrifice became the symbol of Romania's devotion to Christianity and loyalty to Europe.¹⁶⁷ Yet perhaps no nation had more credibility as the shield of Christendom against the Ottomans than Poland and its king, Jan Sobieski. Foreign newspapers celebrated this historical figure as the savior of Christendom.¹⁶⁸ Hungarians often felt frustrated by what they perceived as the West's ignorance of Hungarian deeds and Hungarian heroes. On one occasion the Hungarian consul general in Washington, György Ghika, addressed the lack of recognition of Hungary's hero János Hunyadi in the pages of the *New York Times*, arguing that historical inaccuracies were obfuscating Hungary's "centuries-long struggle."¹⁶⁹ The country's Ottoman past also gained new currency, as Paul Hanebrink's recent article illustrated, in which the country's status as a shield of Europe continued into the twentieth century. Interwar religious and secular leaders, as well as intellectuals, promoted the "ideological link" between Hungary's struggle against the Ottomans in the past and the Communist menace of the present.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ For more on the Romanian, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning, see Zsolt Nagy, "National Identities for Export: East European Cultural Diplomacy in Inter-War Pittsburgh," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 4 (2011): 435–53.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, the article written by Stephen P. Mizwa, founder and president of the Kosciuszko Foundation in New York. Stephen P. Mizwa, "A Pole who Fought for Christendom: Sobieski Beat the Turks at Vienna 250 Years Ago," *New York Times*, September 10, 1933, XX5.

¹⁶⁹ George de Ghika, "How John Hunyadi Fought the Turks," *New York Times*, January 13, 1935, E5.

¹⁷⁰ Paul Hanebrink, "Islam, Anti-Communism, and Christian Civilization: The Ottoman Menace in Interwar Hungary," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 114–24.

Diplomats and scholars alike searched for historical subjects to prove Hungary's supposed democratic and liberal character. In his lecture tour, Pál Teleki looked back to 1222 to illustrate this point:

All of you are familiar with the Magna Charta of King John as the keystone of constitutional freedom in England. You may be less familiar with the fact that among the continental nations Hungary was first to obtain a similar solemn pledge for the respect of civic liberties. I speak of the Golden Bull [*Arany-bulla*] of King Andrew, given in 1222. Here begins a very marked analogy in the development of Hungarian constitutional life. . . . If we speak of democracy in those remote times, [and] we surely find there the origins of the most inspiring ideals of our own time.¹⁷¹

If the Golden Bull was insufficient, the struggles of Ferenc Rákóczi and Lajos Kossuth, “two of the great champions of Hungarian liberty,” against the Habsburgs illustrated the Hungarians’ devotion to liberty and European ideals.¹⁷² Similar emphasis was placed on historical connections between Hungary and the West. Studies such as that of Alexander (Sándor) Fest, maintained, for example, that despite the geographic distance, there were 900-year-old “political and spiritual links between England and Hungary.”¹⁷³ Others, like Georg (György) Lukács, addressed France, while still others, such as Eugene (Jenő) Pivány, wrote about Hungarian-American links.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Paul Teleki, *The Evolution of Hungary and Its Place in European History*, ed. Béla Király (New York: Academic International Press, 1975), 35. Teleki wrote additional works in which he explained the ways he saw Hungarian-European relations: see Pál Teleki, *Európáról és Magyarországról* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1934) and his *Magyar politikai gondolatok* (Budapest: Stádium, 1941).

¹⁷² George Trócsányi, “The Hungarian National Character,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1939): 198.

¹⁷³ Alexander (Sándor) Fest, “Political and Spiritual Links between England and Hungary,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1936): 72–79.

¹⁷⁴ Georges Lukács, *La Hongrie et la civilisation* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1927); and Eugene Pivány, *Hungarian-American Historical Connections* (Budapest: Royal Hungarian University Press, 1927).

Despite the fact that government circles took charge of publications, not everybody was happy with the outcome. Some questioned the target of the cultural propaganda and argued that the “continuity of Hungarian culture” and the preservation of the “Hungarian national idea” were the most important challenges. They insisted that cultural policy should primarily aid and support those three million Hungarians who, after the treaty, became minorities in the successor states.¹⁷⁵ Domokos Kosáry, a historian and the favorite pupil of Gyula Szekfű, questioned the approach and use of historical tropes. In a letter from London to his former advisor, he challenged the logic of relying on what he sarcastically called the “wondrous resemblance” of the English Magna Charta and the Hungarian *Aranybulla*. “It is something that here and today they [the English public] would not believe even if it came from the Archbishop of Canterbury,” wrote Kosáry. He similarly dismissed unsubstantiated notions about America gaining its name from the Hungarian warrior-king St. Imre (Emeric).¹⁷⁶ Kosáry argued instead that, like Marc Bloch (whose Paris lectures he had attended), he would prefer the idea of a “*histoire comparée de l’Europe Centrale*.” He concluded that that every nation could write its own history, but only a comparative history of the region would truly illuminate the historical role of Hungary.¹⁷⁷

Hungarian historical narratives were also in intense competition with histories constructed by Romanian and Czechoslovak scholars. While Hungarians argued that they built a state on previously “barren” land, Romanian historians countered that with a theory of their own. Vasile Pârvan, in his *Dacia: An Outline of the Early Civilisation of the Carpatho-Danubian Countries*, building on the earlier works of Petru Maior, argued that there was continuity of both race and culture

¹⁷⁵ Kálmán Pongrácz, “Magyar kultúrfolytonosság,” *Magyar Szemle*, September 1930, 33–44.

¹⁷⁶ Kosáry to Szekfű (undated), Manuscript Collection of the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (hereafter ELTE Kt), MS G628. I thank Gábor Ujváry for pointing out this collection to me.

¹⁷⁷ ELTE Kt, MS G628, Kosáry to Szekfű (January 21, 1937). He would not write this comparative history—which in fact is not comparative—until 1941: *A History of Hungary* (Cleveland and New York: Benjamin Franklin Bibliophile Society, 1941). The publication fulfilled a long-standing Hungarian dream of publishing a history of Hungary for an American audience.

in the Danubian region from as early as circa 1500 BCE, when the people who were later known as Getae or Dacians settled there. The Dacians, in turn, became Romanized, and they are, the argument runs, the ethnic ancestors of the Romanian nation.¹⁷⁸ Another continuity thesis was put forward by Nicolae Iorga, Pârvan's mentor. Iorga, one-time prime minister and minister of interior, historian, and rector of the University of Bucharest, viewed southeastern Europe, and Romania specifically, as "the spiritual and institutional continuation of Byzantium."¹⁷⁹ He argued that Byzantine ideals, church, and civilization were preserved and protected by various Wallachian and Moldavian princes, such as Constantin Brâncoveanu and Nicholas Mavrocordat. To Iorga, the synthesis of Byzantine high culture and traditional Romanian culture and the supposed historical continuity made Bucharest "the true intellectual capital of South Eastern Europe." He advocated this idea through publications and during his American lecture tour.¹⁸⁰ Iorga's lectures were indeed excellent tools of Romanian cultural diplomacy. A Hungarian diplomat, after attending one of Iorga's lectures in Geneva, reported to the KÜM that the lectures were simply "gripping."¹⁸¹ Iorga's towering intellect certainly helped to present Romania as, in the words of Seton-Watson, the "Latin sentinel upon the Danube."¹⁸²

Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy paid significant attention to historical studies. In this historical construction, the quintessential Czechoslovak characteristic was humanism (*humanita*), embodied by President-Liberator Masaryk. Humanism became the linchpin that connected present Czechoslovakia with its Bohemian historical past,

¹⁷⁸ Vasile Pârvan, *Dacia: An Outline of the Early Civilisation of the Carpatho-Danubian Countries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1928). The book was a result of his earlier Romanian work *Getica: o Protoistoric a Dacici* (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1926) and his Cambridge lectures.

¹⁷⁹ In Virgil Cândea's introduction to the reissue of Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium* (Iași, Oxford, and Portland: Center for Romanian Studies, in cooperation with the Romanian Institute of International Studies, 2000), 8.

¹⁸⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *My American Lectures* (Bucharest: State Printing Office, 1932), 192.

¹⁸¹ MOL, K67, 4. csomó, 1. tétel (April 2, 1924).

¹⁸² Seton-Watson, in his preface to Nicolae Iorga, *A History of Anglo-Romanian Relations* (Bucharest: Societate Anglo-Română, 1931), 4.

a quality that needed worldwide publicity.¹⁸³ Masaryk spoke of this in his *Conversations with Karel Čapek*:

As far as our national programme is concerned, remember what I told you with regard to the development of Europe, and to our own history, that is that we must take a hand in world politics, and consequently be in lively and friendly contact with other nations. Our national revival is a child of Enlightenment and of late Romanticism, it sprang from humanitarian ideals of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries which were broadcast in France, in Germany, everywhere, Humanity—that is indeed our national programme.¹⁸⁴

A contemporary Hungarian observer argued that despite some domestic disagreement on the recent development of Czechoslovak historiography, historical studies transmitted a unified message to the West. After reviewing Kamil Krofta's works, he concluded that in this view, Czechoslovakia was the "chosen nation" of humanity, of freedom of thought and religion, and its history was the accumulation of struggle and of martyrdom in the service of human rights and democracy.¹⁸⁵

In this competitive climate, Hungarians, Romanians, and Czechoslovaks monitored one another's publications and scholarly appearances. Interestingly, each thought that the others had the upper hand.¹⁸⁶ It was an unrelenting and costly competition. As Orzoff illustrates, the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry indeed "tried to create a global Czech presence, whether personal or textual."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Masaryk, *Masaryk on Thought and Life: Conversations with Karel Čapek*, trans. M. and R. Weatherall (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 212.

¹⁸⁵ Lajos Gogolák in *Századok* (1936), 316–17. See Kamil Krofta, *The Short History of Czechoslovakia* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1935).

¹⁸⁶ For Czechoslovakia, see Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 146–47. For Romanian views, see Gábor Egry, "Sérelmek, félelmek, kisállami szuverenitás-dogma. A román politikai gondolkodás magyarságképe a két világháború között," *Limes* 78 (2008): 87–98.

¹⁸⁷ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 151.

For example, French academics and journalists were invited for all-expenses-paid trips to Prague; French scholars and students received regular stipends from the Czechoslovak government and distributed relevant literature.¹⁸⁸ All of them sought to recruit foreign scholars in order to disprove one another's claims. The two towering figures in the field of East-Central European history, Seton-Watson and C. A. (Carlile Aylmer) Macartney, wrote reviews and opinion pieces—not to mention entire monographs—in support of Romanian, Czechoslovak, or Hungarian historical interpretations.¹⁸⁹ Seton-Watson, in his influential *Treaty Revisions and the Hungarian Frontiers*, continued to discredit Hungarian claims. His work was a reaction to István Bethlen's 1933 British lecture tour, which raised public interest in the Hungarian Question. The quotation from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, on the second page of the publication, set the tone for his argument: "Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's."¹⁹⁰ The apt quote was followed by a sophisticated argument in which Seton-Watson rejected claims for the Allies' culpability for the destruction of Austria-Hungary and refuted the "myth

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹⁸⁹ The output of these two figures was vast. From R. W. Seton-Watson, see *Racial Problems in Hungary* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1908); *German, Slav, and Magyar: A Study in the Origins of the Great War* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1916); *Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934); and *A History of the Roumanians: From Roman Times to the Completion of the Unity* ([n.p.] Archon Books, 1963) (originally published in 1934). From C. A. Macartney, see *The Magyars in the Ninth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1930); and *Hungary and Her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and Its Consequences, 1919–1937* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1937).

The two actually broke off relations over one of Macartney's letters to *The Times*. On this and more, see László Péter, "The Political Conflict between R. W. Seton-Watson and C. A. Macartney over Hungary," in *British-Hungarian Relations since 1848*, ed. László Péter and Martyn Rady (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2004).

¹⁹⁰ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934), 2.

of incompetent experts.”¹⁹¹ He emphasized the role of Magyarization in the past and the present, not omitting the question of Hungarian Jewry, including the 1920 Hungarian *numerus clausus*.¹⁹² In sum, Seton-Watson concluded that Hungarian revisionist aims were dangerous to even consider at that time.

Criticism of Hungarian academic propaganda was not limited to the Continent. When Francis Deák wrote his analysis of Hungary's role at the Paris Peace Conference (actually, in his interpretation, the lack of Hungary's role), American historian Bernadotte E. Schmitt harshly criticized it. According to Schmitt, who was once courted by the Hungarians, Deák's account was to be welcomed, and his “yeoman work in collecting the materials” was to be appreciated. However, after pointing out certain issues with the piece, he concluded that “Mr. Deak, in short, despite his parade of scholarship, remains very much a Hungarian propagandist.”¹⁹³ Indeed, because of scholarship's perceived utility to cultural diplomacy, the distinction between academic activities and politics remained blurred.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 18–23.

¹⁹² Prime Minister Bethlen and Klebelsberg were worried about international reaction to the law.

The impact of the *numerus clausus* on the Jewish community continues to be a topic of research. On the flight of Hungarian Jewish students to the universities of Austria and Germany—including Leó Szilárd and Arthur Koestler—see Michael L. Miller, “‘A numerus clausus száműzöttjei’ a berlini felsőoktatási intézetekben 1920 és 1933 között,” *Múlt és Jövő* 4 (2006): 84–91; and Michael L. Miller, “From White Terror to Red Vienna,” in *Wien und die jüdische Erfahrung, 1900–1938*, ed. Frank Stern and Barbara Eichinger (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 307–23. For the statistical survey of the impact of the *numerus clausus* on Hungary's Jewish population, see Gergely Egressy, “A Statistical Overview of the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Law of 1920—Historical Necessity or the First Step toward the Holocaust?” *East European Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2001): 447–64.

For the latest on this issue, see Mária M. Kovács, “A jobboldal és a numerus clausus,” *Élet és Irodalom* 52, no. 42 (October 16, 2009), <http://www.es.hu/index.php?view=doc;24276> (accessed July 7, 2010).

¹⁹³ Bernadotte E. Schmitt, review of *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*, by Francis Deák (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), in *Journal of Modern History* 15, no. 1 (1943): 64–65.

Conclusion

Competition for the hearts and minds of foreign intellectuals continued. Not even the outbreak of the war stopped it entirely. Until 1941, Hungarian cultural diplomacy enjoyed the full support of the government. The HRL continued to operate under ever-more-difficult circumstances, publishing books and pamphlets. Szentkirályi edited a number of works: *Colonel Michael de Kovats: American Revolutionary War Hero* (New York, 1940); *Béla Bartók: His Life and Music* (New York, 1940); and *Hungary: Past and Present* (New York, 1941). Another undertaking was to compile an "American-Hungarian Register," collecting biographical data on about one thousand people.¹⁹⁴ Only Hungary's entry into the war closed down the HRL. Once Hungary declared war on the United States, the State Department ordered all official Hungarian government agencies and organizations to be closed. The HRL was notified of its official closure on January 28, 1942. Afterward, the government of Sweden represented Hungarian interests. Subsequently the library's collection was seized by the Alien Property Custodian. The Feleky Collection was transferred to Columbia, while the rest of the holdings were relocated to a Manhattan warehouse. The collection would be reunited in 1953, when the Library of Congress acquired it.¹⁹⁵ Telkes, who had become a U.S. citizen, remained in the country. He sued the Hungarian National Museum for severance and other payments. Subsequently he worked for the U.S. State Department, the World Bank, and the United Nations. Deputy Director Szentkirályi also remained in the United States and, under the name Joseph St. Clair, worked at the Defense

¹⁹⁴ The project was never realized. However, the information collected was microfilmed and is available at the Library of Congress. See Library of Congress (European Division), *Materials for an American-Hungarian Lexicon: The Biographical Files of the Hungarian Reference Library, 1937–1942*, ed. Kenneth E. Nyirády. Microfilm: 93/991 MicRR.

¹⁹⁵ For this and the rest of the history of the collection, see Nyirady, *The History of the Feleky Collection*, 11–30.

Language Institute in Monterey, California.¹⁹⁶ The HRL's once-so-promising enterprise came to a rather sad end.

Hungarian scholarly publications and lectures continued to "educate" foreigners about the just cause behind Hungarian revisionist aims. Not even the outbreak of World War II entirely stopped these efforts. *A Companion to Hungarian Studies* was published in 1943. In its preface István Bethlen stated:

The *Companion to Hungarian Studies* has been produced to meet a practical need. In recent years the editors of *The Hungarian Quarterly* have found by experience that it is difficult, if not impossible to ask foreign experts to write on Hungarian questions because the information necessary to them on the subject of Hungary and the Hungarian people is almost entirely in the Hungarian language. . . .The *Companion to Hungarian Studies* is therefore intended to supply this need . . . [with the] hope that this book, written and edited in time of war, will one day be read in time of peace by all who are interested in the problems of Central Europe.¹⁹⁷

The *Companion* was designed to serve the Hungarian cause in the upcoming treaties after the war. Once again, the political and intellectual elite of Hungary was to be disappointed.

¹⁹⁶ I thank Kenneth Nyirady for the information about the post-HRL careers of Telkes and Szentkirályi.

¹⁹⁷ Stephen Bethlen et al., *A Companion to Hungarian Studies* (Budapest: Society of Hungarian Quarterly, 1943), xi–xii. Other publications included Francis Deák and Dezső Ujváry, eds., *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary* (Budapest: Royal Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1941).

Chapter 4

Showcasing the Nation: The Role of Tourism

“Tourism is the best foreign policy.”

— *Archduke Joseph Francis*, 1927¹

On June 20, 1927, in the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament during the budget debate, Archduke Joseph Francis (1895–1957) rose to speak: “Revered House, tourism is the best foreign policy; it is the best foreign policy, because it garners friends for the country by acquainting [others] with our domestic reality. Secondly, it allows us to speak about ourselves in a way that enables those abroad to become acquainted with us, which helps us to remove their misconceptions.” He pointed out that advancing and promoting tourism was the best way to confirm and support the government’s political goals and to combat the international “smear campaign” (*rágalomhadjárat*) that aimed to destroy Hungary’s reputation.²

Hungary’s political and industrial elite largely shared his opinion that tourism and its related industries were more than economics. Oszkár Bársony—chief executive of IBUSZ (Idegenforgalmi Beszerzési Utazási és Szállítási Rt.), the Hungarian national travel agency—stated

¹ *Felsőházi Napló*, vol. 1, 1927, 155 (June 20, 1927).

² *Ibid.*, 155–56.

that in the postwar international climate, the Hungarian leadership had to pay attention to the political utility of tourism. "The tourism sector has developed into a political weapon," wrote Bársony, "which—without harming others—has become the most instrumental mechanism of the campaign that seeks to enlighten foreigners [about the character of the country]."³ Another captain of industry, Béla Markos, director of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office (Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal), went even further, arguing that "foreign tourism is the most direct and most effective way to inform others about the worth and value of the nation; hence it is the strongest weapon of propaganda."⁴

What all three quotes have in common is a conviction that the tourism industry had a significant utility in building and rebuilding interwar Hungary's image abroad. This is the heart of this chapter: the real and perceived utility of tourism in building a "national brand" for export—to use a modern term⁵—and the political culture that sur-

³ Oszkár Bársony, *Utazás és idegenforgalom: tegnap, ma és—holnap* (Budapest: Magyar Cobden Szövetség, 1934), 25. Oszkár Bársony (1879–1943) was one of the first Hungarian experts of tourism. His involvement with Hungarian tourism goes back to 1902. While this publication came out only in 1934, the message, I argue, is relevant even earlier.

⁴ Béla Markos, *Az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Egyesülete, 1941), 34. Similarly to Bársony, Béla Markos (1893–1974) was one of the pioneers of Hungarian tourism. Despite the late publication date of his work, he was likewise representative of the mentality that saw tourism as a factor of Hungarian foreign policy.

⁵ It was Simon Anholt who coined this term in 1996. Yet he begins his 2010 book *Places: Identity, Image, and Reputation* by stating: "Let me be clear: there is no such thing as 'nation branding.' It is a myth, and perhaps a dangerous one." While it may seem a "tantalizing prospect," it is an illusion to believe in a "quick fix for a weak or negative national image," Anholt continues. Anholt now views nation-branding not as the solution but rather the problem, for he believes that it is "public opinion which brands countries—in other words, reduces them to the weak, simplistic, outdated, unfair stereotypes that so damage their prospects in a globalized world—and most countries need to fight against the tendency of international public opinion to brand them, not encourage it." Instead, he suggests—admittedly, referring to contemporary issues—that "governments need to help the world to understand the real, complex, rich, diverse nature of their people and landscapes, their history and heritage, their products and their resources: to prevent them from becoming mere brands." For more, see Simon Anholt, *Places: Identity, Image, and Reputation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 1–3.

rounds such an undertaking. In the post-World War I climate, the tourist experience became an indicator of the host country's level of civilization and culture. Governments recognized that tourism was no longer just an economic concern. Because of its ability to shape public opinion, tourism became too valuable a tool in international relations to be left to business interests alone. Indeed, as a 1931 U.S. government study testifies, there were about fifty national governments that in various degrees actively participated in tourism promotion.⁶ Professor A. J. Norval, commissioned in the late 1920s by the South African government to produce an international and national survey of the state of the tourist industry, concluded:

In view of the national importance of the tourist industry to any country at all interested in its development and in view of its bearing on national life economically, sociologically, and politically, no government can neglect the control and direction of its tourist traffic and the formulation of a clearly defined tourist policy directed toward the development of tourist traffic from foreign countries.⁷

Interwar Hungarian tourism experts and politicians faced a daunting challenge, for constructing and reconstructing a tourist industry was a complex undertaking. It was a product of intricate interaction among natural landscapes, man-made constructions, economic and cultural factors, the political and social climate, the people who seek to make sense of the tourist industry to attract visitors, and the tourists themselves. The goal of the archduke, Bársony, Markos, and others was to create tourist attractions that not only promised financial gains but also depicted Hungarian cultural superiority and showcased qualities that the political and intellectual elite deemed signifiers of the country's Europeanness. These goals were significantly different from the goals

⁶ Herbert Max Bratter, "The Promotion of Tourist Travel by Foreign Countries," in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Trade Promotion Series*, no. 113 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), iv.

⁷ A. J. Norval, *The Tourist Industry: A National and International Survey* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1936), 152.

and motivations behind the mid- to late-nineteenth century development of tourism, which sought to distinguish Hungarianness within the confines of the Dual Monarchy. After Trianon, Hungary's physical landscape was significantly altered. The country lost its mountains and its access to the sea. Moreover, the tourist industry needed to produce an image of a sovereign country that carried out its own foreign policy. The postwar political turmoil, as Chapter One illustrated, also significantly limited the development of tourism. Yet the authoritarian nature of the consolidation period under Bethlen might actually have benefited tourism.⁸ Indeed, the government took a leading role in its reorganization, but Hungarian tourism was not controlled by the government—not until after 1938—in the same way that Germany's *Kraft durch Freude* and Italy's *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* were.⁹ These models simply could not work in Hungary, because although the government was certainly not democratic, it was not in a position to control industry, or for that matter society, as a whole. The development of tourism required the willingness of the private sector to invest; thus ideological goals sometimes needed to be sacrificed. Moreover, unlike the German and Italian organizations, the interwar Hungarian political elite's goal was not primarily to promote domestic tourism but rather to promote Hungary as a travel destination to foreigners.¹⁰

⁸ This “paradox” whereby “the political stability provided by an authoritarian regime may even serve to encourage the development of a tourist industry” was put forward by Colin Michael Hall in his *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), 84.

⁹ On these organizations, see Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁰ In this the Hungarian model was closer to Italy's government-founded ENIT (Ente nazionale per le industrie turistiche) and the Soviet Union's efforts through its All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS). On ENIT, see Taina Syrjämaa, *Visitez L' Italie: Italian State Tourist Propaganda Abroad, 1919–1943* (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1997). On the Soviet efforts, see Michael David-Fox, “From Illusory ‘Society’ to Intellectual ‘Public’: VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period,” *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 1 (2002): 7–32. For the role of tourism in the interwar Soviet cultural-diplomatic campaign, see

As the government sought to shape the tourist image and the tourist experience, it was also forced to engage with and, at times, direct the discussion about national identity. As Eric G. E. Zuelow puts it, construction of “national tourism requires consideration of precisely what it means to be part of the nation in question, of its defining characteristics, history, and geographic space.”¹¹ Thus the government’s agency was not limited to passing legislation and regulations, coordinating the works of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and providing the necessary infrastructure; it also acted as “arbiter” between various interest groups.¹² The challenge was to find the mental and physical landscape that best depicted Hungarianness. However, as Chapter Two explained, there was no clear understanding of what Hungarianness actually meant. In the case of tourism, Hungary was sometimes represented as a Christian-national nation uniquely defined by its traditions and its traditional countryside. At other times the country was promoted as a modern, progressive, and unquestionably European locale. In this highly charged and contested political process, the natural and physical landscape was ascribed with meanings and values, often conflicting ones, in order to produce the desired outcome.

The desired outcome was satisfied tourists who, upon returning to their home countries, could act as goodwill ambassadors for Hungary.¹³ This goal, and the nature of tourism, made the construction of tourist attractions and the image of Hungary a process that was not only susceptible to internal negotiations but also subjected to real and perceived external criteria. Thus whatever tourists were seeking—be they John Urry’s tourist, seeking experiences that are “by comparison

David Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experience*. On later Soviet policy, see Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘There’s No Place Like Home’: Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 4 (2003): 760–85.

¹¹ Eric G. E. Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xxx.

¹² I borrow the concept of government as an arbiter from Hall, *Tourism and Politics*, 37.

¹³ In a way, this is what Hans Magnus Enzensberger argued when he wrote that upon their return, the tourists themselves “turn into the attraction.” See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “A Theory of Tourism,” trans. Gerd Gemünden and Kenn Johnson, *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 134.

with the everyday, out of the ordinary,” or Dean MacCannell’s tourist, looking for authenticity—they had a significant impact on the construction of the tourist image that emerged.¹⁴ If we accept that tourism serves as a “building block of national identity,” then perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that foreign tourists, even if unintentionally, contributed greatly to the construction of Hungarian national identity.¹⁵ Accordingly, Hungarians identified, constructed, and reconstructed—one might say, staged—national narratives and heritages that sought to promote both domestic identity construction and a desirable foreign image.¹⁶

The Hungarian Tourist Industry and the Image of Hungary before Trianon

For Western travelers of the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, Hungary was an unknown or, at best, undesirable destination. When sons and, to a lesser degree, daughters of the English and other Western European upper classes traveled to the Continent during their Grand Tour, they usually followed the route through Paris, Turin, Florence, Rome, Naples, Venice, Vienna, Rhineland and Low Countries. Early travelogues indicate that Hungary was often represented, if at all, as a destination not only undesirable but also inhospitable and dangerous. In 1717, when the famed Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,

¹⁴ For John Urry’s Foucauldian construction of the “tourist gaze,” see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 9–11. For MacCannell’s explanation, see Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 99. For his latest criticism of Urry’s notion of the tourist gaze, see Dean MacCannell, “Tourist Agency,” *Tourist Studies* 1 (2001): 23–47.

¹⁵ Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford, UK, and New York: Berg, 2000), 10.

¹⁶ I am using the word “heritage” here, for I believe that David Lowenthal is absolutely on point when he differentiates between history and heritage. He argues that while “history explores and explains the past,” heritage “infuses” it “with present purposes.” See David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York and London: Free Press, 1996), xi.

wife of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, announced her plans to leave for Hungary, Viennese high circles tried to convince her not to undertake the journey:

Almost every body I see frights me with some new Difficulty. Prince Eugene [Prince Eugene of Savoy] has been so good as to say all the things he could to perswade me to stay till the Danube is thaw'd that I may have the conveniency of going by Water, assuring me that Houses in Hungary as such as are no defence against the Weather and that I shall be oblig'd to travel 3 or 4 days between Buda and Esseek [today Osijek in Croatia] without finding any house at all, through desart plains cover'd with Snow, where the cold is so violent, many have been kill'd by it. I own these Terrors have made very deep impression on my mind, because I believe he tells me things truly as they are, and no body can be better inform'd of them.¹⁷

In a later letter, Lady M explained she could “hardly forbear laughing” when she recalled “all the frightful ideas that were given” her, for she experienced none of the horrors foretold by her Viennese friends.¹⁸ Nonetheless, a hundred years later, a French traveler received a similar reaction from a Viennese clerk who, learning of his desire to continue his travel to Hungary, “repeatedly exclaimed, striking his head in astonishment: ‘Von Paris nach Ungarn! From Paris to Hungary!’”¹⁹ It is telling that some Western visitors saw Vienna, as one traveler described it, the “connecting link between the civilization of Europe and the barbaric magnificence of the East.”²⁰ Others, a bit more generous, placed Hungary at the crossroads of the Occident and the Orient, “both in

¹⁷ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s letter to her sister (Vienna, January 16, 1717). Reproduced in Robert Halsband, ed., *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1, 1708–1720 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 295.

¹⁸ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s letter to her sister (Petrovaradin, January 30, 1717). Reproduced in Halsband, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 297.

¹⁹ François Sulpice Beudant, *Travels in Hungary in 1818* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1823), 48.

²⁰ Bayard Taylor, *Views A-Foot or Europe Seen with Knapsack and Staff* (New York: W. L. Allison, 1848), 194.

Asia and in Europe.”²¹ Those who visited the country acknowledged its natural beauty but often provided a harsh depiction. Julia Pardoe’s 1840 book *The City of the Magyar* cautioned that “all persons travelling in Hungary must make up their minds resolutely to fling from them every feeling of hyper-fastidiousness, both as regards to roads, horses, drivers, and accommodation; to brave delay, disappointment, even danger, and to prepare themselves to do battle with inconvenience of every description.”²²

For whatever reason—be it the semi-Orientalization of Eastern Europe by Enlightenment thinkers, a Western lack of knowledge, or real and perceived economic and cultural backwardness—Hungary was not a popular destination for Westerners. Hungarians themselves recognized and struggled with this less-than-desirable foreign image. Some intellectuals, closely connected with Hungary’s mid-nineteenth-century nation-building project, reacted resentfully to the negative image and produced a counter-narrative in which Hungary was a friendly, safe, and certainly European country.²³ Reformers from Hungary and Transylvania, among them István Széchenyi, Bertalan Szemere, and Sándor Bölöni Farkas, who traveled to the West, were forced to recognize both that their country lagged behind the West and that very little was known abroad about Hungary and Hungarian achievements.²⁴

²¹ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 183–89 and 155–71 *passim*.

²² Julia S. H. Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar, or Hungary and Her Institutions in 1839–40* (London: George Virtue, Ivy Lane, 1840), 55. Pardoe’s work generated quite a response from Hungarian nationalists, not least Lajos Kossuth, who referred to the book as a collection of “lies that are injuring our characters and hearts.” Kossuth’s 1841 response to Pardoe’s book was published in the Hungarian daily *Pesti Hírlap*. Quoted in Irina V. Popova-Nowak, “A nemzet felfedezésének Odüsszeiája: Magyarok Magyarországon és külföldön, 1750–1850,” *Korall* 7, no. 26 (2006): 143. Popova-Nowak explains that Pardoe was actually a great friend and goodwill ambassador of Hungary.

²³ Popova-Nowak, “A nemzet felfedezésének Odüsszeiája,” 144–45.

²⁴ See the accounts of István Széchenyi, Bertalan Szemere, and Sándor Bölöni Farkas in *Orientations: An Anthology of East European Travel Writing, ca. 1550–2000*, ed. Wendy Bracewell (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2009), 109–18.

Economic and political developments gave new hopes to the nascent Hungarian tourist industry. Industrialization and the subsequent birth of the Hungarian railway (July 15, 1846) and the 1856 opening of the Vienna-Pozsony (today Bratislava in Slovakia)-Pest line made travel faster. The Revolution of 1848 also contributed to Hungary's changing image. Yet Western travelers' image of Hungary continued to be rather negative. In 1866 one of the most influential British monthlies, *MacMillan's Magazine*, published an article titled "Glimpses of Magyar Land." The author's view was rather discouraging: "When you have traveled over a dozen miles in Hungary you have seen the country. Such was the assurance I received from everybody; and my subsequent experience confirmed its truth. Hungary has one singular recommendation, as a land to travel in, namely, that it contains absolutely nothing."²⁵ In addition, the "strange-sounding un-European names" of towns and places made the author uneasy, and he only felt relief when he saw the lights of "Pesth" (the nineteenth-century German spelling of "Pest"). He was also unimpressed by Hungary's largest city. He wrote: "Pesth has the merit of not having anything much to offer in the way of sights."²⁶ A year after the *Ausgleich*, with the 1868 establishment of the Royal Hungarian State Railways or MÁV (Magyar Királyi Államvasutak), the state took charge of the railways and began the organization of the tourist industry. The American 1877 edition of *A Satchel Guide for the Vacation Tourist in Europe* concluded that in Budapest "the churches and the public buildings are of no particular interest."²⁷ When William Henry Seward, the U.S. secretary of state under Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, visited Hungary in 1870, he wrote positively of Budapest, but even he noted upon arrival in Vienna that he and his company "have been enjoying glimpses of Western civilization [among them aspects of Budapest], but only partial glimpses as if through

²⁵ Edward Dicey, "Glimpses of Magyar Land," *MacMillan's Magazine* 13 (1866): 378.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 380. It was not until 1873 that Buda, Pest, and Óbuda merged and Budapest was born.

²⁷ Quoted in József Böröcz, *Leisure Migration: A Sociological Study on Tourism* (New York: Pergamon/Elsevier Science, 1996), 23.

long and shaded vistas.”²⁸ Only as he walked on the “wide and magnificent streets” of the “great city” of Vienna was he able to say that he had returned to the “very centre” of Western civilization.²⁹ Others located the essence of the country in the *puszta* romanticism and described the country as a land where Gypsies, aristocrats, and peasants lived in a fairytale-like harmony. This view of the Other is perhaps best expressed in French travel writer Victor Tissot’s *Unknown Hungary* and worth quoting at length:

On a wide staircase, leading to a room raised seven to ten feet above the one in which we were, stood three young girls dressed in the Hungarian national costume. The outline of their graceful figures showed to advantage under the *rékli*, a jacket embroidered with braid and silver buttons, and ornamented with flowers, of leather work, something like a hussar’s cloak, and lined with sheep-skin with its warm soft wool. Their petticoats, fastened over this, descended puffed out in a thousand plaits like pipes nearly to the ankles, clothed in well-fitting stockings, their feet being shod in shoes, whose high heels were destined to keep time in cadence to the evolutions of the czardas. . . . These three girls were of a fresh and striking beauty. Their large brown eyes with their fringed lashes had all the calm depth of those of Orientals, and their rosy lips, showing white teeth, smiled with all the *spirituel* gaiety which is one of the charms of a Hungarian woman.

The young peasants came down to the lower floor, and the judge good-humouredly detailed to me, one after the other, the various parts of their costume.

“And now,” he said, pulling out his watch, “let us go to the Gypsies.”

²⁸ William H. Seward, *Travels around the World* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873), 719.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Amongst the Gipsies! . . . Free as a bird, a traveler like the wind, the Gipsy goes as the humour may take him, in the direction of his will or fancy. What does he require to make him happy? A brunette companion, the sun, a carpet of grass, a boundless horizon, a murmuring of a stream in the moss, a little of the poetry of savage life, which make city life seem monotonous and sad in comparison. There where he can find pasture enough for his horses, and wood enough for his fire, he pitches his cloth tent, and spends his days lying on his back or on his face, smoking his pipe, “as tranquilly as if he wanted nothing in the wide world,” and, whilst he watches the smoke dispersing in the air, dreaming ineffable dreams. . . . In his apparent misery this Mohican of Europe remains a millionaire of illusion, of gaiety, of good humour . . . this is the Gypsy’s home, the land of his adoption! and where could he find it better than in the immense steppes of Hungary, where he can travel whole days without meeting a living creature except the eagle, swans, flights of ducks, and troops of wild horses? Like the Bedouin, whose brother in vagabondage and poetry he is, the Gypsy cannot settle down . . .³⁰

Tissot’s picture, which transformed the Hungarian countryside into the land of “beautiful women, fine horses, good wine, and gypsy music,” produced the standard themes of *pusztá* romanticism for years to come.

While the tourist industry continued to be the primary focus of private enterprise, by the late nineteenth century, the government became more aware of the economic, social, and political advantages of tourism. Private organizations organized and promoted Hungarian hot springs and spas, Budapest, Lake Balaton, and the Tatra Mountains to both domestic and foreign audiences. Targeting the domestic traveler were the Carpathian Association of Hungary (Magyarországi Kárpát-egyesület), established in 1873, and the Spa Joint-Stock Company of

³⁰ Victor Tissot, *Unknown Hungary*, trans. Mrs. A. Oswald Brodie (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1881), 26–28. The translation was based on the fourth (!) French edition. But the original was published only a year earlier, 1880. Italics in the original.

Almád (Almádi Fürdő Részvénytársaság).³¹ The next landmark decision was connected with Undersecretary Gábor Baross, who during his lifetime earned the nickname “Iron Minister” because of his commitment to the development of Hungarian railways. His involvement signaled the beginning of state interest in tourism. Under his sponsorship the First Hungarian Ticket Bureau (Első Magyar Menetjegy Iroda) was established in 1884 to coordinate train travel.³²

The real breakthrough was the government-sponsored 1885 National Exhibition in Budapest, considered by Oszkár Bárony to be the birth of the Hungarian tourist industry.³³ That year, 66,773 foreign visitors came to Budapest.³⁴ Nevertheless, industry experts realized the need for further reforms and improvements. In order to promote Budapest as a tourist destination, a special committee put forward a fifteen-point program.

- 1) Produce descriptions in various foreign languages about Budapest.
- 2) Place reviews of Budapest in foreign newspapers.
- 3) Place a review of Budapest in the Baedeker guide.
- 4) Produce photos of Budapest and distribute them abroad, *with special emphasis on the East*.
- 5) Find a way to distribute low-priced tickets—on those railway and nautical lines that connect the East and the West through Budapest.

³¹ On the Carpathian Association of Hungary and subsequent Magyar Tourist Association and their role in the nationalization of the tourist industry, see Alexander Vari, “From Friends of Nature to Tourist-Soldiers: Nation Building and Tourism in Hungary, 1873–1914,” in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 64–81.

³² Lajos Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története* (Budapest: IBUSZ Igazgatóság, 1992), 6.

³³ Quoted in Márta Jusztin, “‘Utazgassunk hazánk földjén!’: A belföldi turizmus problémái a két világháború között Magyarországon,” *Korall* 26 (2006): 190.

³⁴ Statistic from Béla Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története és jövő célkitűzései* (Budapest: MIÉSZ, 1942), 11. A word of caution is necessary about these statistics and those presented later in this chapter. For the most part, these numbers will represent visitors only to Budapest; there was no effort made to collect data for the rest of the country.

- 6) Advertise travel deals.
- 7) Publish foreign-language guides.
- 8) Publish and distribute information pamphlets about conditions and prices of hotels, restaurants, and transportation.
- 9) Produce maps of Budapest.
- 10) Regulate hotel room prices.
- 11) Provide foreign-language-speaking (*nyelveket beszélő*) museum guides.
- 12) Produce foreign-language catalogs of the treasures of the museums.
- 13) Establish clubs and recreational and holiday sites.
- 14) Provide moral and financial support for festivals.
- 15) Establish the Budapest Metropolitan Museum.³⁵

The program, developed by the private sector, sought the rapid professionalization of the tourist industry. Establishing the infrastructure and service industries necessary for the further development of tourism was the organizers' chief concern. The program also made it clear that tourism was driven by economic concerns (hence that promotion of Hungary in the East among the wealthy sons and daughters of the Russian nobility).³⁶

While it is hard to argue with the predominance of economic considerations in the development of nineteenth-century Hungarian tourism, it became an essential component of the nation-building project in which Hungary sought to differentiate itself from its Austrian counterpart. Hungarian efforts were in tune with the nineteenth-century zeitgeist and its "international exhibitionary complex,"³⁷ whereby each nation "started to construct heritage and tourist attractions in

³⁵ In József Klaudy, *Az európai legelső nemzeti utazási iroda története* (Budapest: IBUSZ kiadás, 1943), 18–19. Italics are mine.

³⁶ On the Eastern orientation of nineteenth-century Hungarian tourism and its early efforts to connect East with West, see András Sipos, "Világváros? Nyugat és Kelet határán? Várospolitikai törekvések Budapest nemzetközi vonzerejének erősítésére, 1870–1918," in *A világváros Budapest két századfordulón*, ed. Györgyi Barta, Krisztina Keresztély, and András Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2010), 309–21.

³⁷ Tony Bennett, quoted in Mary Neuberger, "Introduction: Exhibiting Eastern Europe," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 539.

contrast and comparison with others.”³⁸ One of the milestones of Hungarian attempts to define national essence was the 1896 Millennial Exhibition.

Examination of the Millennial Exhibition offers a window into the complexities of constructing a national image, for it showcased the duality between traditional and modern and the dichotomy between Oriental and Occidental that defined Hungarian national-identity construction for decades to come. The celebrations of 1896 served as a “coming out party” for the nation that sought to define itself. One of the spokespersons for Hungarian aspirations was Emperor and King Franz Joseph. In the *New York Times*, he was quoted as saying that he hoped that the celebrations allowed other nations to recognize Hungarian achievements in arts and culture.³⁹ The international press understood the Hungarian intentions, which were put forward by one of the country’s greatest literary figures, Mór Jókai. It was Hungary’s “civilizing mission,” something, as Apponyi’s previously quoted speech testifies, that would define Hungarian self-understanding for decades:

The Hungarian people have proved today to the world that they have created a modern State, and that after incessant endeavors the country has attained the level of European civilization, but that it has, nevertheless, preserved its national character, and that the civilizing mission of the Hungarian Nation is living truth and reality. We await with confidence the judgment to be passed on us.⁴⁰

³⁸ Orfar Löfgren, “Know Your Country: A Comparative Perspective on Tourism and Nation Building in Sweden,” in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 139.

³⁹ “In Arpad’s Heroic Land: Hungary’s Initial Ceremonies of its Millennium Celebration,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1896, 5. The transformation of Franz Joseph from villain to hero in the Hungarian imagination would be worth a study in itself. At least one foreign observer—William H. Seward—noted his surprise at the “sentiment of loyalty to the Emperor of Austria, as the King of Hungary.” See Seward, *Travels around the World*, 712.

⁴⁰ Jókai, quoted in “Glories of the Magyars,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1896, 10.

As the study of Dorothy Barenscott illustrates, the organizers strove to showcase the modern, progressive, and European character of the country, which had opened the first underground railway in continental Europe; just completed the construction of Budapest's main boulevard, Andrásy Avenue; and dedicated Hungary's new Parliament building.⁴¹ On the other hand, the would-be visitor would have gazed upon the colorful traditional folk heritage of the nation that openly celebrated its Eastern—some would say Oriental—roots. Indeed, Hungarians not only embraced the idea of being an “exotic island of Europe” but actually promoted it. At the center of the celebration was the overshadowing figure of Árpád. The leader of the Magyars and his seven chieftains were memorialized in the epic painting of Árpád Feszty and the monumental statues of the Millennium Memorial on Budapest's Heroes' Square. In the latter, which historian András Gerő refers to as the “national altar,” the figure of St. Stephen, together with some historical figures of the House of Habsburg, was relegated to the back of the exhibition.⁴² Nor did St. Stephen fare better in the exhibition's official picture guide; the publication, issued in four languages, did not even include the name of Hungary's first king.⁴³

Despite the relatively positive international media attention and the arrival of 93,408 foreign visitors, the Millennium Exhibition did not meet the hopes of its organizers.⁴⁴ They had to accept that Budapest was far from ready to welcome masses of tourists, as infrastructural issues (the quality and quantity of accommodations) surrounding the exhibition indicated.⁴⁵ Nor was their goal of changing the country's standing on the international tourist stage entirely successful. There was positive international coverage, but the old image—that of a backward country that was something other than European—did not dis-

⁴¹ Dorothy Barenscott, “Articulating Identity through the Technological Rearticulation of Space: The Hungarian Millennial Exhibition as World's Fair and the Disordering of Fin-de-Siècle Budapest,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 571–90.

⁴² On the changing utility of the Millennium Memorial, see András Gerő, *Képzelt történelem* (Budapest: PolgArt, 2004), 203–40.

⁴³ See Gyula Laurencic, *Az ezeréves Magyarország és a milleniumi kiállítás* (Budapest: Téka, 1990). Reprint of the 1896 original.

⁴⁴ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 11.

⁴⁵ Jusztin, “Utazgassunk,” 191.

appear. For example, the influential British monthly review *The Nineteenth Century* devoted a lengthy essay to the event that acknowledged certain positive elements and even some optimism about the country's future, but was not without stereotypes and judgmental attitudes. It began by stating that even those who knew that a certain country called Hungary existed "somewhere in Europe or near Europe—public consciousness was really not quite clear about that"—were mostly familiar with four things: Hungarian wines, music and musicians, flour, and Lajos Kossuth.⁴⁶ The Hungarian was rhapsodic, for the "Magyar will spend fifteen hours in wild dancing, drinking, and rollicking to the bewildering music of his national airs but on sobering up he will go to the council-chamber of his country and discuss in gravest manner the topics of national or local policy."⁴⁷ This was not the glowing image Hungarians sought to establish. The organizers noted with considerable disappointment that not even a concentrated propaganda effort could put Budapest, and consequently Hungary, on the mental map of foreigners as a travel destination.⁴⁸

To remedy these problems, in 1900, Prime Minister Kálmán Széll organized a symposium titled "What Needs to Be Done to Attract Foreigners to Hungary?"⁴⁹ The same year saw the first Hungarian work on tourism and the establishment of the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club (Királyi Magyar Automobil Club). In 1902 the Central Ticket Bureau (Központi Menetjegyiroda) merged the bureaus of the Royal Hungarian State Railway, Thomas Cook, and Wagons-Lits. The same year also witnessed the birth of the predecessor of IBUSZ, the Tourism and Travel Company (Idegenforgalmi és Utazási Vállalat). At this point Hungarian efforts especially targeted Russia. To the Russian nobles who flocked to Europe, Hungary was presented as not just a transit country but a destination. Accordingly, the first travel bureaus were

⁴⁶ Emil Reich, "Hungary at the Close of Her First Millennium," *The Nineteenth Century* 39 (January–June 1896): 837.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 838.

⁴⁸ András Sipos, "A hivatalos várospropaganda Budapest-képe a két világháború között," in Tímea N. Kovács, Gábor Böhm, and Tibor Mester, eds., *Terek és szövegek: Újabb perspektívák a városkutatásban* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2005), 156.

⁴⁹ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 12.

opened in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa, and Warsaw.⁵⁰ Improvements continued as Budapest organized its first Spring Trade Fair (Tavaszi Vásár) in 1906, the predecessor of the Budapest International Trade Fair (Budapesti Nemzetközi Vásár—BNV). The 1908 establishment of the Permanent Medicinal and Thermal Bath Association of Budapest (Budapest Állandó Gyógyfürdő Bizottsága) was intended to organize and further develop Budapest's spa culture.⁵¹

Though the outbreak of World War I naturally slowed the progress of tourism, Hungary still attempted to develop travel- and leisure-related activities. Among these, the most significant was the 1916 establishment of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office (Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal), followed by the National Tourism Bureau (Országos Idegenforgalmi Iroda), established by then-prime minister Sándor Wekerle, which sought to gain government control over the industry.⁵² However, the reality of war limited the possibilities. The organization was aborted, and the development of Hungarian tourism and related industries came to a temporary halt.

Between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1910s, the Hungarian tourist industry developed from its embryonic stage to an industry of national interest. The once-private enterprise became a state concern, for the leadership realized the potential of tourism in nation-building. In the first decades of the twentieth century, experts and government officials alike grew increasingly wary of the nation's foreign image. A 1903 pamphlet from the Central Ticket Bureau signaled the changing attitudes. Tourism, the pamphlet stated, was an industry of "patriotic and national importance." It further argued that the visitors' personal experience would alter the "oblique and false" foreign views of Hungary.⁵³ It was an argument that continued to serve as the rationale behind the postwar Hungarian government's efforts to reorganize and control tourism.

⁵⁰ Márta Jusztn, "A turizmus története a két világháború között Magyarországon" (PhD diss., Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest, 2002), 151–52. I would like to express my gratitude to Márta Jusztn for sending me a copy of her dissertation.

⁵¹ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 12–13.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Quoted in Klaudy, *Az európai legelső*, 25.

“A Country without Mountains or Sea”: The Reorganization of the Hungarian Tourist Industry after World War I

In addition to the country's international isolation, economic devastation, and political unrest, Trianon turned Hungary into a “*sehegye, setengere ország*,” meaning a country without mountains or sea.⁵⁴ The Hungarian tourism industry lost its most desirable destinations (aside from Budapest): the Tatra Mountains, the Carpathians, and access to the Adriatic Sea. Illustrative of the challenges faced by the tourism sector was the fact that, while pre-Trianon Hungary (not including Croatia) had 203 spas and medicinal bath resorts, it now had sixty-three; likewise, while the country previously had thirty mountain retreats, it now had two.⁵⁵

The foreign image of Hungary as a tourist destination was not much better. József Böröcz, in his quantitative analysis of contemporary guidebooks, argues that Hungary was barely on the “mental map” of Europe.⁵⁶ Böröcz's analysis is based on weighted representation of various countries in editions of *Appleton's European Guide Book Illustrated* and *A Satchel Guide for the Vacation Tourist in Europe* published between 1870 and 1925. While there were numerous travel guides and travelogues that failed to even mention Hungary,⁵⁷ perhaps it would be better to say that for the Hungarians, it was the country's perceived

⁵⁴ Reference made in Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története*, 13.

⁵⁵ Statistics from *Felsőházi Napló*, vol. 4, 1927, 33 (March 13, 1929).

⁵⁶ Böröcz, *Leisure Migration*, 32–39.

⁵⁷ For example, other publications that did not mention Hungary at all were Curtis Guild, *Abroad Again or A Fresh Foray in Foreign Lands* (Boston: Charles T. Dillingham, 1877); Ralph Adams, *Heart of Europe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916); and Robert Shackleton, *Unvisited Places of Old Europe* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Company, 1925). The description of Hungary in the 1926 edition of H. A. Guerber's *How to Prepare for Europe* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1926) was virtually the same as its 1906 edition. In a section still titled “Travel in Austro-Hungary,” the guide stated that “although there is much to see in Hungary, the country is as yet not overrun by tourists” and suggested that to “gain a fair idea of Hungary,” one should take a riverboat from Vienna in order to pass by Pressburg, even though, by this time, “Pressburg” had been renamed Bratislava and was part of Czechoslovakia.

positioning on the mental map of Europe, between the Orient and the Occident, that was the real issue. The word “perception” may be better used in its plural form. One perception was that of the Hungarians, in which they saw the country as a geographical and cultural entity that, despite all efforts, remained outside the West. In this Hungarians differed very little from their regional counterparts, for most countries of the region regarded their eastern border as the end of Europe and the West. The other perception, however, was that of Western travelers. Many of their accounts spoke of the experience crossing between East and West and concluding that Hungary and Budapest belonged to neither. For example, popular American travel writer Frank George Carpenter argued that Rudyard Kipling was wrong to write that East and West would never meet, for according to him, in Budapest the East and the West joined together.⁵⁸ Others, like Baltimore traveler Helen Forman Kerchner, expressed their excitement to see Budapest, a city that was “new and marvel” to “Occidental eyes.”⁵⁹ Mabel Herbert Urner was similarly taken by the “enchanted city of Budapest,” where everything was “much more foreign than Vienna.”⁶⁰ Yet others lamented the progress of Budapest and felt nostalgic for the city they once knew and loved, with its Oriental traits, “its gypsies,” “its luxuriousness, its frothy gayety and soirees at the aristocratic clubs, where the elegance of the women was sometimes as striking as a beautiful work of art.”⁶¹ The challenge for tourism professionals and the government was to create an image that both satisfied economic considerations and helped construct a new foreign image. Was it best to develop the image of a modern and progressive country, proving beyond doubt that Hungary was part of the West? Or were they to embrace the romanticized version of the Old World? Or perhaps try to do both as part of the concept of *Mitteleuropa*?

⁵⁸ Frank Carpenter, “Budapest, the City of Two Worlds,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1924, H11.

⁵⁹ Helen Forman Kerchner, “Budapest Marvel to Occidentals,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 31, 1926, MA4.

⁶⁰ Mabel Herbert Urner, “The Enchanted City of Budapest,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1925, K14.

⁶¹ “Budapest Wish to Be Modern Injures Beauty,” *China Press*, March 4, 1928, D5.

As the newly independent country sought to define itself in the new European configuration, tourist image played a very important role in Hungarian cultural diplomacy. But as the government and private sector sought to resurrect the Hungarian tourism industry, they faced the fact that the country was domestically divided, internationally isolated, and economically limited. The Bethlen government sought to mend the situation.⁶² In the domestic arena, Bethlen created a coalition party to control Parliament, built a pact with the Social Democratic coalition, reduced the influence of the ultra-Right, and outlawed Communists. At the same time, he severely curtailed voting rights and disenfranchised large portions of the society. On the international scene, the violence of the White Terror (preceded by the Red Terror of 1919 under Béla Kun), the *numerus clausus* and the continuous lack of representation of peasants and workers in politics created a rather negative image of Hungary. Prior to 1922, Hungary was one of only eight countries not belonging to the League of Nations.⁶³ Bethlen's government sought to break out from this isolation with the help of Mussolini. The economic recovery was similarly problematic. At first, the Bethlen government sought economic momentum by embracing an inflationary fiscal policy. However, by 1924 it became clear that the policy did not work, and Hungary turned to the League of Nations for loans. As the aforementioned works of Zoltán Peterecz and Miklós Lojkó showed, under the watchful eyes of Jeremiah Smith, the League of Nations commissioner-general for the 1924 loan to Hungary, the financial reconstruction of the country gained the necessary impetus.

By 1926 the Bethlen government, having addressed the country's most troublesome domestic, international, and economic problems, launched its active foreign policy, in which cultural diplomacy, and subsequently tourism, played an important role. The most significant milestone in the development of interwar Hungarian tourism industry happened in 1926, when the government, through the medium of the Royal Hungarian State Railway Company, purchased 80 percent of

⁶² Chapter One offers a more comprehensive examination of the Bethlen consolidation.

⁶³ Out of these eight countries, four (Hungary, Germany, Bolshevik Russia and Turkey) were clearly unsatisfied with the postwar European status quo.

the Tourism and Travel Company Incorporated's shares.⁶⁴ This newly restructured company, IBUSZ (Idegenforgalmi Beszerzési Utazási és Szállítási Rt.), was the first step in the state centralization of the tourist industry. Here the Hungarian government followed the example of the ever-growing number of nations that took varying degrees of ownership of their tourist agencies: the Austrian ÖVB, the Czechoslovak Čedok, the Polish Orbis, the Yugoslav Putnik, and the Romanian Sardev.⁶⁵

IBUSZ was a majority-owned government agency, or as Minister of Commerce Tihamér Fabinyi noted, "80 percent government-owned but 100 percent government-regulated."⁶⁶ As such, it enjoyed enormous benefits. One member of the Hungarian Parliament aptly characterized IBUSZ: to outsiders it was a private enterprise, while to insiders it was a state public-service corporation (*állami közüzem*).⁶⁷ IBUSZ enjoyed a monopoly on domestic railway ticket sales and was shielded against foreign competition, including takeover bids by Wagons Lits-Cook. The 1929 establishment of the Parliamentary Committee on Tourism was a further indication that the government indeed viewed tourism as a political tool.⁶⁸

The worldwide Great Depression had a negative impact on the government's centralization plan, yet this by no means meant that tourism received less attention. On the contrary, under the new government of Gyula Gömbös, tourism and IBUSZ received harsh criticism. Minister of Commerce Tihamér Fabinyi, while defending IBUSZ activities, acknowledged the need for some reorganization and pointed out that tourism was very seriously regarded in government circles, not least because of its political utility. It enabled Hungary "to gain friends" who, on returning home, would "preach" and help Hungarian

⁶⁴ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. 11, 1927, 261 (April 25, 1928).

⁶⁵ During the interwar years, ÖVB (established in 1917), Orbis (1920), Čedok (1920), and Putnik (1923) all became in varying degrees government-owned and -operated.

⁶⁶ MOL K106 174. csomó 139. tétel (Washington, DC, January 4, 1935).

⁶⁷ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. 26, 1927, 491 (April 30, 1930). Speech given by Károly Rassay.

⁶⁸ Among its members were past, present, and future prime ministers (Count Móric Esterházy, István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös, Kálmán Darányi, Pál Teleki, and Miklós Kállay) and members of the influential nobility (Count Sándor Festetics and Archduke Joseph Francis).

justice (i.e., the revision of Trianon) to prevail.⁶⁹ Jenő Czenner's militaristic analogy described the past achievements of tourism and its future role: "The work done until now can be compared with irregular forces' guerilla warfare, which was able to break down the resistance. Now draws closer the territorial occupation, which requires a standing army, a qualified officer corps, and a forceful general who can establish a front and can organize the occupation."⁷⁰

As soon as Hungary recovered from the economic crisis, the second phase of the tourist industry's centralization began. The Hungarian Royal Ministry's 11.001/1935 order on the regulation of tourism created a central body to oversee the industry and to ensure its cohesive development: the Hungarian National Tourism Bureau (Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatal). The OMIH, as the organization became known, operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Commerce. Its first president, Géza Tormay, was appointed by the Ministry of Commerce and the Cabinet Council.⁷¹ Paragraph 3 of the OMIH order made it clear that all tourism-related activity—both at home and abroad—belonged to the sphere of the organization. The following seventeen-point regulation shows that the government aimed to centralize and regulate all aspects of the industry. The Bureau was tasked as follows:

- 1) To regulate the work and agenda of all tourism-related authorities, institutions, associations, and societies to make certain that their efforts are coordinated.
- 2) To oversee the budget and development program of all tourism-related and government-supervised institutions.
- 3) To manage, inspect, and facilitate tourism activities at the county, town, and village level.

⁶⁹ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. 14, 1931, 17–20 (March 8, 1933).

⁷⁰ Jenő Czenner, "A magyar idegenforgalmi politika reformja," *Magyar Szemle* 20, no. 3 (March 1934): 271.

⁷¹ A Magyar Királyi Minisztérium 11.001/1935. M.E. számú rendelete az idegenforgalmi ügyek szabályzásáról, §1 and §2. Published in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1936), 8.

- 4) To ensure that places, collections, institutions, folk-art manufactured goods, and other products with significance to tourism are readily available and of a quality worthy to represent the national culture.
- 5) To supervise all tourism-related investments.
- 6) To ensure that significant sport and touristic events, congresses, cultural festivals, exhibitions, hunting and fishing prospects, and all other possible tourism-related occasions are serving the enhancement of tourism.
- 7) To assure that the preconditions and prospects are available for greater foreign purchase of folk, craft, and industrial goods.
- 8) To supervise the quality standards of the food and beverage trade and to support its further development.
- 9) To conduct tourism propaganda abroad, to direct other entities' similar efforts, to study and utilize instruments of modern propaganda.
- 10) To establish tourism propaganda bureaus abroad and supervise them and relocate or close them as appropriate.
- 11) To ensure cooperation with tourism-related organizations abroad.
- 12) To generate an annual budget and plan designed to further develop the tourist industry.
- 13) To review public transportation plans related to the tourist industry.
- 14) To supervise the work of domestic travel agencies and other tourist propaganda bureaus.
- 15) To supervise the work of tour guides and pay attention to the quality of their vocational training.
- 16) To collect and process tourism-related data and information.
- 17) To develop tourism-related training and literature.⁷²

This seventeen-point program, unlike the late nineteenth century's fifteen-point program, clarified that the government had control over tourism. From building infrastructure and regulating the service industry to overseeing propaganda, the government gained the power

⁷² Ibid., 8–10.

to manage the whole industry. The dual nature of the industry, economic and cultural-diplomatic, was addressed in the organization's structure, consisting of two departments. One department oversaw the economic aspects, while the other supervised propaganda. Without question, the latter, which is most germane to the argument of this study, required further attention and investment. Accordingly, as the program illustrates, the government sought to standardize the production of propaganda, paying due attention not only to quantity but also to quality. Indeed, foreign propaganda for Hungarian tourism needed all the help it could muster, for Hungary's image abroad continued to be less than desirable.

Tourism Propaganda and the Constant Problem of Image

"[There] are so many strange and exaggerated stories afloat about Hungary and her people, that a few remarks on this subject cannot be omitted," states the 1927 government-sponsored guidebook, *Budapest: All That Is Interesting in the Hungarian Capital*.⁷³ The guidebook, published for an American audience, was especially critical of Victor Tissot's aforementioned characterization of Hungary. "The naïve impression contained in M[onsieur] Tissot's book on Hungary are [*sic*] still accepted in some countries," reads the travel guide. It continues by stating that "not long ago, a French Minister, asking about Hungary, enquired whether the streets of Budapest were yet clear of the 'csikós' [horsemen of the plains]. This is equivalent to asking an inhabitant of New York whether cowboys are still lassoing [*sic*] wild cattle on Broadway or Fifth Avenue!"⁷⁴ Was there ever such a French minister? Perhaps not. Yet this anecdote represents the fears and anxieties that Hungarians felt about their image, which were not entirely baseless. In one of the era's most popular American travelogues, the Carpenter's

⁷³ Municipal Information Office, *Budapest: All That Is Interesting in the Hungarian Capital* (Budapest: Printing Office of the Municipality of Budapest, 1927), 23. The original publication translated "Budapest Székesfővárosi Idegenforgalmi Hivatal" as the "Municipal Information Office." In my translation, this is the "Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office."

⁷⁴ Ibid.

World Travels series, Frank G. Carpenter painted a romantic yet rather medieval picture of Hungary. Unlike Czechoslovakia, which was “the land of the peasant whose greatest men have sprung from the soil and whose people believe in democracy,” Hungary was the “land of the aristocrats where nobility still rules.”⁷⁵ Through photos and descriptions, the reader learned of a romanticized and mystical Hungary that was “home of the fortune-telling gypsies, who ply their trade in the cities.”⁷⁶ On the other hand, this was a country where medieval conditions were still present, for the same “wanderers” (Gypsies) lived in the countryside, “where they are noted for letting their children go naked, even in cold weather” and where “under the watchful eye of the noble owner . . . gangs of men and women bend their backs at work in the fields from dawn until dark.”⁷⁷

The characterization of Hungary as feudal or semi-feudal did not go unnoticed but was far from the only issue that concerned the political leadership. Travelogues went beyond the depiction of natural and physical landscape and often offered a critical description of the political reality. When former World War I war correspondent and recipient of Knight of the Order of the British Empire Sir Philip Gibbs visited Hungary, former prime minister Pál Teleki tried to convince him that while “the distribution of land [was] not exactly democratic,” it was incorrect to call the country feudal.⁷⁸ The question of revisionism was also a popular theme. In most of the travelogues I have consulted, the authors mentioned in one way or another that “in Hungary one hears a great deal about the injustice as the outcome of the Treaty of Trianon.”⁷⁹ Others depicted Hungary as a “country of discontent”⁸⁰ or, as the earlier-quoted Japanese traveler so aptly noted, a “country

⁷⁵ Frank G. Carpenter, *The Alps, the Danube, and the Near East* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1924), 130.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Philip Gibbs, *European Journey* (New York: Literary Guild, 1934), 312.

⁷⁹ Lieut.-Colonel P. T. Etherton and A. Dunscombe Allen, *Through Europe and the Balkans: The Record of a Motor Tour* (London: Cassell and Co., 1928), 96.

⁸⁰ Samuel van Valkenburg and Ellsworth Huntington, *Europe* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1935), 526.

grinding her teeth.”⁸¹ Many Western travelers noted, most with considerable pride, the attention they received for simply being from the West, but most also understood that what they experienced was indeed a form of propaganda. In the words of Philip Gibbs, “the Hungarians have a genius for hospitality and propaganda. They surround an Englishman with their most intelligent and attractive ladies for propaganda purposes, so that it is natural, as well as just, to recognize instantly the claim of such a nation to treaty revision. I met one Englishman in Budapesth [sic] who confided in me that the only meal he had ever paid for in that city was breakfast. I had had the same generous entertainment.”⁸² Was there ever such an English gentleman? We cannot know for sure, but it is certain that the Hungarians wined and dined many foreigners in their attempt to gain new friends for the Hungarian cause. And they did not stop there.

To counter the negative and/or stereotypical representation of the country, the Hungarian Foreign Service, just like its Czechoslovak counterpart, funded foreign travel writers who were politically reliable yet credible enough to write travelogues and guides about Budapest and Hungary.⁸³ “Those who come to Budapest will not, we think, quarrel with the statement that it is one of the most beautiful and attractive Capitals of Europe,” writes Clive Holland in his 1935 book *Hungary: The Land and Its People*.⁸⁴ His book was very well received by Hungarian authorities, who ordered hundreds of copies placed in various embassies and cultural/educational institutions worldwide. Only a few pages in the files of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry archives remain as evidence that Holland was hired by the ministry; worked directly with László Bárdossy, who six years later would

⁸¹ Ichikawa, *Japanese Lady in Europe*, 357.

⁸² Gibbs, *European Journey*, 304.

⁸³ For an excellent example of Czechoslovak efforts, see Orzoff's examination of Cecil J. C. Street's 1924 travelogue *East of Prague* in Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 148–51.

⁸⁴ Clive Holland, *Hungary: The Land and Its People* (London: John Miles Ltd., 1935), 87. In fact, “Clive Holland” was the pseudonym of British author and photographer Charles Hankinson. See Lóránd Czigány, ed., *The Béla Iványi-Grünwald Collection of Hungarica: A Catalogue* (London: Szepesi Csombor Literary Circle, 1967), 57. Thanks to Peter Sherwood for pointing out this detail.

become the prime minister of Hungary; was provided with a car and chauffeur, accommodations, and food and beverages for two; and was aided in every possible way to write his book.⁸⁵ Similarly, when Hugh Hessel Tiltman approached the London embassy for support of his new guidebook on the “unknown Europe,” his request was well received. The decision’s impetus is telling of the Hungarians’ mindset. First, Tiltman was a relatively well-known author. Second, while the KÜM disapproved of some of his earlier books, such as *The Terror in Europe*, critical of the White Terror of the Horthy regime, and *Peasant Europe*, which was deemed too “radical,” he was nevertheless seen a “friend of revision,” for he was “clearly aware of the injustice of the peace treaties.” Old injuries were quickly forgotten in the face of the overriding need for positive publicity. In addition, from the viewpoint of the KÜM, he was acceptable because while he had friendly relations with Czechoslovak circles, he “could not stand the Romanians” and was *persona non grata* in Yugoslavia. With this sort of letter of recommendation, Tiltman was able to arrive in Hungary and enjoy both financial and moral support from the government.⁸⁶ The result of the support was Tiltman’s 1936 *European Excursions*. The book’s relevant chapter painted a rather positive picture of Hungary and the Hungarians. The travelogue, as Tiltman explained, was for people “who has a taste for new experiences.” However, continued the author, “to speak of ‘getting off the beaten track’ in a land with two thousands years of civilisation behind it would be a misnomer.”⁸⁷ Accordingly, Tiltman focused on the countryside attractions. His superlatives describing the “real Hungary”—Balatonfüred as a potential Brighton, Lucerne, or Atlantic City; or Miskolc as the Bruges of Eastern Europe—might make today’s reader smile a bit but fit the bill as far as the KÜM was concerned.

While recruiting and paying foreign writers, the KÜM played a pivotal role in establishing travel bureaus abroad. It facilitated the OMIH, IBUSZ, and various other state-owned (and related) organizations’ efforts to compete for foreign tourists. By the mid-1930s Hungary had turned its attention mainly toward the West and had

⁸⁵ MOL K66, 264. csomó, III/6/b/1 (April 25, 1935).

⁸⁶ MOL K66, 296. csomó, III/6/b (December 28, 1934).

⁸⁷ H. Hessel Tiltman, *European Excursions* (London: Jarrolds, 1936), 194.

bureaus in Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Venice, Milan, Paris, London, Brussels, Ankara, Cairo, Sofia, and New York.⁸⁸ The New York office was especially important to Hungary. First, as mentioned earlier, the United States was one of the key targets of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, because the United States never ratified the postwar treaties, and its support for Hungarian revisionist aims was essential. Second, American tourists were the prime target for all nations, for they had the most money to spend. According to a U.S. government study, in 1929 alone American tourists spent \$839,000,000 on foreign travel.⁸⁹ Hungary received \$1,063,000 of this amount.⁹⁰ The small East and East-Central European countries, despite the obvious impact of the Great Depression, became new, hitherto undiscovered destinations for American tourists. This caught the eye of the *New York Times* when it reported in 1930 that as “the dollar travels further” and “as more governments offer new attractions,” so does “Mid-Europe draw a tide of tourists.”⁹¹ In 1934 the Hungarian Tourist Bureau opened its doors in the R.K.O. Building of Rockefeller Center. Its stated goal was improving Hungary’s image in the United States. According to a report sent to the Washington embassy, in 1935 the office answered 1,500 written queries and provided 3,000 people with information.⁹² The office’s activities included lectures in the largest U.S. cities, newspapers and magazine publicity, film and radio presentations, and the organization of exhibitions. In addition, the Bureau oversaw the distribution of propaganda materials, from the Cunard White Star ships to university libraries. In 1937 the office sent out 120,497 pamphlets and 3,353 posters to travel agencies, libraries, and schools in the Americas.⁹³ In addition, both the KÜM and the OMIH put pressure on the government to offer special exchange rates in the form of travel coupons, and finally to offer free visas to American travelers. The results were impressive. Between 1934

⁸⁸ Tausz, *A magyar idegenforgalom története*, 17.

⁸⁹ Bratter, “The Promotion of Tourist Travel,” 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹¹ “Mid-Europe Draws a Tide of Tourists,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1930, 4E.

⁹² MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139. tétel (Washington Embassy, May 7, 1936).

⁹³ MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139. tétel (Washington Embassy, April 30, 1938).

and 1937, the number of Americans who visited Budapest grew from 2,595 to 12,936.⁹⁴

The KÜM and its ambassadorial staff were also essential to the building and safeguarding of Hungary's image abroad. A 1934 KÜM order called upon all embassies and consulates to provide the "most effective support" of tourist propaganda. The KÜM staff also monitored all Hungarian-related publications, measured their propaganda effectiveness, and served as the first line of defense against negative publicity. For example, when Bernard Newman, who toured the Danube region on bicycle, published *The Blue Danube*, the London embassy pointed out to the KÜM its possible propaganda use. The KÜM deemed the book "good" but decided that it had no potential for either political or tourism-related propaganda; hence it did not order the book for mass distribution.⁹⁵ It also oversaw the quality and subject matter of promotion that originated from Hungary. It was an especially serious concern, for despite strenuous efforts, the quality and the production of Hungarian propaganda materials remained disorganized.

According to Béla Mátéka, secretary of the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office, the first large-scale Budapest promotional pamphlet was produced in 1925 in 200,000 copies.⁹⁶ By 1937 the same office produced 1,103,102 pieces of advertising in eleven languages. It mailed this astonishing amount of material (weighing 20,291 kilograms or 44,640 pounds) in 49,479 parcels worldwide.⁹⁷ Likewise, IBUSZ also increased its propaganda budget. In 1932, 43,000 pengő was set aside for advertising; in 1936, the company spent 226,000 pengő on it.⁹⁸ The number of magazines and newspapers skyrocketed. The *Idegenforgalmi Újság* (Tourist Journal) (established in 1924) was among the first to

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ MOL K66, 264. csomó, III/6/b/1 (May 27, 1935).

⁹⁶ Béla Mátéka, "A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája történetéhez gyűjtött adatok, prospektusok, stb—1922–1942." Unpublished manuscript, available at the Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár.

⁹⁷ Dezső Zilahy and Béla Markos, eds., *Jelentés Budapest 1937. évi idegenforgalmáról s az 1937. év idegenforgalmának gazdasági eredményeiről* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1937), 33. This was an annual report on the status of Budapest's tourism, published between 1931 and 1941. Hereafter I will refer to this as *Jelentés* and by year.

⁹⁸ Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története*, 20.

target foreigners already in Hungary. The paper, which began as an in-house information pamphlet for the Grand Hotel Royal, grew into a magazine published in Hungarian, French, and German, with information useful for all travelers. The *Budapester Fremdenzeitung*, established in 1928, provided information for tourists in German, English, and French. After its reorganization in 1935, the magazine included surveys and short studies of Hungarian history, art, music, and gastronomy.⁹⁹ Other publications followed, such as the *Idegenforgalmi Kurír*, a free weekly magazine, produced in four languages, mailed to 3,000 addresses in Europe and the United States.¹⁰⁰ But perhaps the most representative and the highest-quality of all these publications was *Hungaria Magazin* (1936–1944), a joint venture of IBUSZ and the Royal Hungarian State Railways.

Hungarian efforts began to pay a dividend. Between 1927 and 1937, the number of foreigners staying in Budapest hotels and pensions rose from 94,869 to 182,747, a 93 percent increase. These numbers include those coming from former Hungarian territories, as well as arrivals from farther afield. The number of tourists originating from outside the boundaries of the former kingdom rose from 60,400 to 149,580, an impressive 148 percent increase.¹⁰¹ The average time spent in Budapest also increased from 2.5 nights to 3.27.¹⁰² According to the same statistics from the Hungarian Economic Research Institute, an estimated additional 56,391 visitors stayed in private Budapest accommodations in 1937.¹⁰³ In 1937 the twelve most significant nations for the Hungarian tourist industry were Germany (with 30,938 visitors), Austria (29,069), Czechoslovakia (20,680), Romania (17,662), Great Britain (15,815), the United States (12,936), Italy (9,130), Yugoslavia (8,135), France (7,964), the Netherlands (4,776), Poland (3,515), and Switzerland (3,463).¹⁰⁴ As the statistics illustrate, the Hungarian tourist

⁹⁹ For more on this, see Juszti, "A turizmus története a két világháború között Magyarországon," 194–98.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, "A magyar idegenforgalom alakulása, 1927–1937—Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet 13. számú különkiadványa" (Budapest: Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, 1938), 30.

¹⁰² Ibid., 12.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁴ *Jelentés 1937*, 7.

industry was growing. By 1937 the once-nonexistent industry produced forty million pengő, which was equal to 7 percent of the country's total exports.¹⁰⁵ Tourism was making a substantial contribution to the Hungarian economy.

Despite the industry's economic success, not everyone was pleased with the image that tourism created and promoted. When Dezső Keresztury, under the sponsorship of the Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin, surveyed two hundred German university students and professors about their image of Hungary, he discovered that thanks to their image of simple and traditional village life and the splendor of the nobility, the Germans saw the Hungarians as a "naively conservative people rooted in the land" on the one hand, and people with a penchant for "grandeur and theatrics" on the other.¹⁰⁶ Keresztury, a writer, translator, and public intellectual, was not alone. More and more people—politicians, industry experts, and public intellectuals—continued to question the quality and message of Hungarian tourist propaganda. Some called for the creation of a Hungarian Baedeker, one that was free of clichés.¹⁰⁷ János Pelényi, the Hungarian ambassador to the United States, voiced his disappointment with the Hungarian tourism promotion in a private letter to Nándor Zichy (director of OMIH's propaganda division). He maintained that Hungary needed better representation of its culture in the United States than the folk dolls, gourds, and embroidery that Washington received as propaganda material. According to Pelényi, this material belonged "in a low-end Rathskeller" and, simply put, "it would have been better to throw the money out of the window without much ceremony than to spend" it on this sort of advertising.¹⁰⁸ The real question that Hungarian tourism faced was not its economic viability but its utility in Hungary's cultural-diplomatic efforts.

¹⁰⁵ Kudar, *Az IBUSZ története*, 21. However, one must note that Hungarians also spent a great deal of money abroad; thus the overall balance sheet of tourism (incoming versus outgoing) was not so positive.

¹⁰⁶ Dezső Keresztury, "Magyarország a német közvéleményben," *Magyar Szemle*, September 1932, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Sinister, "Magyar 'Baedeker' Magyarországról," *Magyar Szemle*, July 1931, 273–74.

¹⁰⁸ MOL K106, 174. csomó, 139. tétel (Washington Embassy, undated).

Competing Mental and Physical Landscapes of Hungary's Tourist Image

Hungary's image abroad continued to be a divisive issue. This debate in many ways was a subset of the larger, almost obsessive questioning of the Hungarian national character that Chapter Two sought to describe. As the tourism industry became increasingly politicized, the question of a tourist image turned into an interrogation of national character. This discussion was further complicated by the growing tension between Hungary's two cultural currents: *népi* and *urbánus*. The former represented traditionalism, saw the essence of Hungarian-ness as rooted in the countryside and its people, and was not entirely free from anti-Semitic themes—though it would be a mistake to equate the movement with anti-Semitism. The latter, mainly popular among Budapest's (often Jewish) intellectual circles, was modern, progressive, and cosmopolitan.¹⁰⁹ While this debate did not directly influence politics, it certainly had an impact on the discussion about Hungarianness, and consequently, indirectly, influenced the discussion about the nature of tourism.¹¹⁰ Tourism was transformed into a place where competing visions of Hungarianness that focused on ideals, places, and symbols were contested. It was in this milieu that Sándor Karácsony, in his aptly titled essay "Hungarianness as a Problem for Tourism" ("A magyarság, mint idegenforgalmi probléma"), argued that "if we want them [foreign tourists], we must have something to show them and something to tell

¹⁰⁹ The *népi(es)-urbánus* debate was a very complex phenomenon that defined Hungarian cultural and intellectual life from the early 1930s to the late 1940s. For more, see Chapter Two.

¹¹⁰ At times, however, there was an explicit connection between cultural/literary circles and government or government-related agencies on the question of tourism. One of the most germane connections was the 1932 *Nyugat* conference on tourism. Here literary greats (such as Zsigmond Móricz) were seated together with tourism experts (such as Oszkár Bársony, head of IBUSZ, and Dezső Zilahy of the Metropolitan Tourism Office). *Nyugat* was Hungary's most progressive literary journal between 1902 and 1941. The entire debate is available online: "Idegenforgalom (Nyugat-konferencia, 1932 december 7)," *Nyugat* 24 (1932), <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/nyugat.htm> (accessed September 9, 2013).

them.” “Unfortunately,” he continued, “we do not even know [what that is] ourselves.”¹¹¹ The section that follows illustrates the lack of consensus on this issue and answers the following questions: What were the competing visions for the national brand “Hungary”? In which ways did the government create and promote these rival perceptions? To what degree were those Hungarian stereotypes produced by Hungarians themselves?

Interwar Hungary’s tourist image had three main components: modern, Western, and progressive Budapest; the traditional, Eastern, and romanticized countryside; and the “rest,” characterized by a mixture of Occidental and Oriental, a blend of “old and new,” including Lake Balaton, Lillafüred, and some of the largest towns in the countryside. These components were much more than simple geographical destinations. Each represented a different vision of Hungary, but none were either exclusive or monolithic, especially the case of Budapest. Yet each of these places identified, (re)constructed, and promoted different and often seemingly conflicting national narratives to present the essence of Hungarianness.

Budapest was the center of Hungarian tourism. It represented the modern, cosmopolitan, fashionable, and unquestionably European Hungary. As Robert Nemes illustrated in his *The Once and Future Budapest*, Budapest was the “holy city” for nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalists who aimed to make it a wholly Magyar city, the symbol of Magyardom.¹¹² The growth and development of the city cannot be divorced from the awakening Hungarian national consciousness. In 1720 the population of Buda and Pest was a mere 11,000; by 1831 the number of inhabitants had grown to 103,000; and by 1867 Buda and Pest boasted 280,000 people, making the twin cities the seventh-largest European metropolis. Between 1867 and 1914, Budapest was the fastest-growing city in Europe. In 1918, Budapest’s population

¹¹¹ Sándor Karácsony, “A magyarság, mint idegenforgalmi probléma,” in Béla Markos, ed., *Az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Egyesülete, 1941), 240. Note the publication date. This shows that the question of national character remained a troublesome question.

¹¹² Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 3.

stood at 933,000.¹¹³ Although it was the center of industry, culture, and politics, many Hungarians felt ambivalent about their booming capital. According to historian John Lukacs, “the elements of a fatal discord and division between the urban and the populist, between the commercial and the agrarian, between the cosmopolitan and the nationalist, between the non-Jewish Hungarian and the Jewish-Hungarian culture and civilization of Budapest were already there” in 1900.¹¹⁴ But, continues Lukacs, the “break had not yet come,” for in this era industrialization and capitalism peaked, and as Budapest grew as a center of commerce, finance, and industry, the “coexistence” between the leading classes remained mutually beneficial.¹¹⁵ As the rift grew, so did the differences and disagreements between capitalist, modern, and cosmopolitan Budapest and the agricultural, semi-feudal, and traditional countryside. Parallel with the cultural fissure grew a political one, as Budapest became the symbol of the liberal Left, even of the radical Left, while the rest of the country was seen as the fortress of the conservative Right. Once the “holy place, the Mecca of Hungary,” Budapest was to some, like Dezső Szabó and Miklós Bartha, the “fever-ridden Sodom.”¹¹⁶

The final break with Hungary’s liberal past came in the wake of World War I. After the short-lived regime of Count Mihály Károlyi and its dream of a democratic Hungary, Béla Kun and his 133 days of Bolshevik dictatorship further exacerbated existing political and cultural divisions. Budapest and the progressive liberal—mostly Jewish—segment of its population became the scapegoat for all the damage and harm that had befallen the country, from losing the war through the Red Terror to foreign occupation.¹¹⁷ The counter-revolutionary forces gathered in the southeastern city of Szeged. In their new Christian Hungary, there was no room for “sinful Budapest.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 73.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*, 189; and Lukacs, *Budapest*, 187.

¹¹⁷ On the issue of “scapegoating,” see Attila Pók, *A haladás hitele: progresszió, bűnbakok, összeesküvők* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010).

¹¹⁸ For more, see Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 108–37.

On November 15, 1919, Admiral Miklós Horthy arrived in Budapest riding a white horse at the head of his troops. It was symbolic, for in Hungarian mythology the white horse plays a central role. The legend states that the Magyars gave a white horse in exchange for their land in the Carpathian Basin. Árpád, the chieftain who led and settled the Hungarians in 896, was often represented riding a white stallion. This was an establishment of a new Hungary, and Admiral Horthy, addressing the crowd and the mayor of Budapest, left little doubt about how he felt about the city:

Mr. Mayor! In the name of the Hungarian national Army, I offer you my sincere thanks for the warm welcome. Today, on the threshold of this city, I am not prepared to speak in conventional phrases. My sense of justice compels me to tell you plainly what is uppermost in my mind in this moment. When we were still far distant, when our hope of returning to this poor, ill-fated city, arms in hand, was the merest of glimmers, we cursed and hated her, for from afar we saw only the mire into which she had sunk and not the persecution and martyrdom which our Hungarian brethren were suffering.

The Hungarian nation has ever loved and admired Budapest, this city which, in recent months, has been its degradation. Here, on the bank of the Danube, I arraign her. This city has disowned her thousand years of traditions, she has dragged the Holy Crown and the national colours in the dust, she has clothed herself in red rags. The finest of the nation she threw into the dungeons or drove into exile. She laid in ruin our property and wasted our wealth.¹¹⁹

Horthy and company were also “ready to forgive” the “misguided city if she will turn from her false gods to the service of the Fatherland.”¹²⁰ Budapest was to become a tourist destination and present to the world

¹¹⁹ Admiral Nicholas Horthy, *Memoirs* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957), 104–5. This was the English publication of the memoirs. There are other versions of this infamous speech with some stylistic variations, but the main message and the accusatory tone remain the same.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

the “best of Hungarian virtues.” But what were Hungarian virtues? As Alexander Vari’s recent study explains, during the 1920s, nationalist and ultra-nationalist groups aimed to carry out a symbolic and physical takeover of the Hungarian capital. While they more or less succeeded in the 1920s, especially in comparison to their counterparts in Berlin and Paris, they could not turn the tide of international tourism promotion, consumerist practices, and business considerations.¹²¹ It was not something that governmental circles and/or government-related companies and entities were blind to, nor could they afford to portray Budapest in a one-dimensional way.

From the beginning, IBUSZ, OMIH, and their counterparts produced a plethora of new nicknames for the capital: “the Queen of the Danube,” “the Pearl of the Danube,” “Spa City Budapest,” and “Fashion Town Budapest.”¹²² Béla Mátéka’s manuscript tells the story of the birth of the brand name “Queen of the Danube.” Venice was referred to as the “Queen of the Adriatic,” and Stockholm as the “Venice of the North,” but what about the Danube? Mátéka asked. While Vienna was a larger city, its geographical location on the river was not like Budapest’s. Linz and Passau enjoyed very fine settings, but they were too small, while Belgrade—according to Mátéka—could not compete with Budapest as a “metropolis.”¹²³

¹²¹ Alexander Vari, “Re-Territorializing the ‘Guilty City’: Nationalist and Right-Wing Attempts to Nationalize Budapest during the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (2012): 709–33.

¹²² The old slogans included “the Paris of the East.” Alexander Vari argues that interwar city marketers rejected the designation, because nationalist promoters sought to reconnect the capital with Hungary, to make it a city of the Hungarians, instead of a metropolis or world city (*világváros*) such as Paris. While Vari’s interpretation certainly fits the nationalizing tendencies of the Christian nationalist government, city promoters—as Vari himself notes—continued to represent Budapest as a metropolis, especially to foreign audiences. See Alexander Vari, “From ‘Paris of the East’ to ‘Queen of the Danube’: International Models in the Promotion of Budapest Tourism, 1885–1940,” in *Touring Beyond the Nation: A Transnational Approach to European Tourism History*, ed. Eric G. E. Zuelow (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 105, 110–11.

¹²³ Mátéka, “A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája,” n.p.

One of the immediate concerns of industry experts was to promote Budapest in Vienna. Vilmos Kovácsházy, a member of the Budapest Metropolitan Council, pointed out that in 1928, Vienna's tourist traffic was five times that of Budapest. He argued that the most pressing issue was to convince tourists visiting Vienna to continue on to Budapest.¹²⁴ In 1931 the Budapest Tourist Office opened its doors in Vienna. The office had a dual function: it was a place for ticket purchases, money exchange, and other administrative tasks and also a center of propaganda. The office placed travel posters in railway stations and wagons (promoting the BNV and St. Stephen's Week in August), placed travel ads in newspapers and travel brochures, and gave talks promoting Budapest using slides and films. In 1936 the office placed 284,851 pieces of propaganda material and gave seventy-four talks to 11,252 people. According to the office's records, in 1936, 24,773 people from sixty-two countries visited the office and received information. The office organized 134 bus tours to Hungary for 10,856 people in the same year.¹²⁵

The slogan "Spa City Budapest" signified but one face of the Hungarian capital, which was represented as a modern health-spa and bath destination. As the *Hungaria Magazin* cover illustrates, Spa City Budapest appeared in tourism promotion as the nexus of modern entertainment on the one hand and classic timelessness on the other—a perfect place for healing and enjoyment. In the background the illustration depicts an antiquity-like figure—perhaps Hygeia, the goddess of health—suggesting medicinal qualities. In the foreground is a young, healthy female diving into the water, suggesting fun and entertainment (Figure 1). Budapest's spa culture dates to Roman times. Aquincum—as the settlement was known in 300 CE—was the capital of Roman Pannonia. According to excavations, Aquincum boasted twelve baths, all of which were destroyed after the fall of Pannonia. In medieval times the development of the thermal baths continued, but the zenith of bath and spa culture was reached during the

¹²⁴ Vilmos Kovácsházy, *Magyar idegenforgalmi propaganda Wienben* (Budapest: Különlenyomat a fővárosi évkönyv 1930. évi kötetéből), 3–4.

¹²⁵ Vilmos Kovácsházy, *Budapest székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája Bécsben* (Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1937), 4–27.

145 years of Ottoman rule. The occupying Ottomans did not destroy the baths but continued to develop them. The growth of spa culture continued under the Habsburgs, most notably in Northern Hungary. By the nineteenth century, spas were destinations for the nobility, for the wealthy seeking remedies for their health problems, and for those simply seeking pleasure.¹²⁶

Most of Hungary's spas were lost after the Trianon Treaty; thus Budapest became the center of attention. "Let Budapest be the grand center of culture, art, and commerce, and most importantly, let it be a world-famous spa city, which it is destined to be by nature," said Archduke Joseph Francis, president of the Budapest Spa City Association.¹²⁷ In order to gain control over the use and development of thermal baths, Act XVI of 1929 distinguished between medicinal and leisure baths. Medicinal baths required the approval of a health care professional. The government proposed to establish a body to oversee all aspects of spa operation, including the expansion of existing spas and the establishment of new ones. It gave the government the right to expropriate lands where new thermal sources were located. To promote new development, the government also offered twenty years of operation tax-free to investors. This followed the examples provided by French, Italian, Swiss, Austrian, and German authorities. Under the direction of the new official body, the National Committee for Springs and Bath Resorts (Országos Forrás- és Fürdőügyi Bizottság), and the Central Committee of Budapest's Medicinal and Holiday Resorts (Budapesti Központi Gyógy- és Üdülöhelyi Bizottság), Budapest's spa culture grew and modernized. By 1930 there were thirteen baths in Budapest, providing between thirteen to fifteen million gallons of thermal water daily. The Central Committee and the OMIH sponsored visits of foreign journalists and doctors, hosted tourism and medical conventions (such as the 1929 International Exhibition of Balneology and Tourism), and placed promotional materials in newspapers and

¹²⁶ For an excellent monograph on Austro-Hungarian bath and spa culture, see László Kósa, *Fürdőélet a monarchiában* (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 1999).

¹²⁷ Quoted in János Benyó, *Budapest fürdőváros és az idegenforgalom* (Budapest: Magyar Idegenforgalmi Érdekeltségek Szövetsége, 1932), 36.

medical and tourist journals.¹²⁸ In addition to exhibitions and fairs (such as the “Das Bad von gestern und heute” exhibit in Zurich and the Brussels World’s Fair), they also utilized tools of modern propaganda, such as radio and film.¹²⁹ The “Three Health Weeks in Budapest” program was especially successful, and by 1936 the visiting of Budapest spas was on the rise, while other historical baths in Europe (Baden bei Wien, Karlsbad, Wiesbaden, and Marienbad) were losing tourist traffic. For the political and industrial elite, Budapest’s success as a spa destination showed the nation’s success as a modern and progressive country. Perhaps the best praise and validation of Budapest as a “Spa City” came from Gaston Gerald, the French minister of tourism: “Not every nation has the good fortune to win through tourism . . . but for the Hungarians, nature gave everything to make their country one of the centers of European tourism. The beauty of Budapest and its health spas are without equal in the world. Every time I am here, I feel that I am at the edge of the West, at the last stronghold of the West.”¹³⁰ This was a designation that the architects of Hungary’s cultural diplomacy would happily embrace.

Additionally, Budapest offered visiting tourists something the small spa towns of Europe could not: a vibrant nightlife. As the cover art for *Hungaria Magazin* shows, the city offered sophisticated dance halls accompanied by the backdrop of Budapest’s nightlights (see Figure 2). Although it is not clear whether the cover art represents an actual place or is simply an artistic rendition, it depicts the city nightlife from two different perspectives. The interior (depicted in a drawing) features elegant couples dancing, suggesting refined and classy entertainment. The window overlooks the Danube, showcasing (with a photographic image) a nighttime vista of Budapest. Indeed, the city actually

¹²⁸ *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1936), 16–17.

The competition for medical tourism was intense. Czechoslovakia, for example, was also a great destination for health-spa seekers. The Czechoslovak Čedok also utilized medical journals to promote its spas. See, for example, “The Spas of Czechoslovakia: A Medical Tour of Pistany and the High Tatra Health Resorts,” *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3465 (1927): 1015–16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Benyó, *Budapest fürdőváros*, 36.

offered a seemingly limitless variety of busy coffeehouses, bars, and nightclubs, from the ordinary through the sophisticated to the risqué. Budapest's nightlife had something for everyone. One of the staples was the EMKE bar, where patrons could enjoy both Gypsy music and jazz. Hungarians often spoke out against the predominance of Gypsies in travelogues about Hungary. Victor Tissot remarked on the presence of Gypsies, making a point about them being the "brothers" of Bedouins and thus comparing the level of their cultural developments. Yet before blaming Tissot's characterization on Westerners' Orientalism alone, one must read—style and grammar mistakes and all—the ways Hungarians presented the Budapest scene themselves.

We must admit that Budapest has also fallen victim to the dancing and jazz band epidemic now raging all over the world, although there are ample opportunities in Budapest, before the jazz band period, to have really good time with traditional gypsy music. There certainly is no another city like Budapest with good gypsy bands in every Hotel, Restaurant and Café.

In many localities the gipsies, those brown-faced descendants of the Pharaohs, supply dancing music for the five o'clock teas every afternoon, but the jazz bands are even more numerous.¹³¹

The undisputed king of 1930s Budapest nightlife was the Arizona Nightclub, which catered almost exclusively to foreign tourists. The owners, Sándor Rozsnyai and his wife Mariska Senger (also known as "Miss Arizona"), traveled the world and brought home their experiences to 20 Nagymező Street.¹³² Arizona's fame carried it to the pages of *Life* magazine, and one Irish travelogue devoted an entire chapter to a night at the Arizona. The nightclub opened at 10:00 p.m. daily; from 11:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m., there was a cabaret and revue show offering variety performances on a revolving stage. One could find African-American jazz standards, striking Hawaiian music, Portuguese *fado* from a "forgotten opera called *Blanco y Negro*," "exotic ballet," "acro-

¹³¹ Municipal Information Office, *Budapest*, 12.

¹³² For an entertaining account of the "Budapest Broadway," see András J. Surányi, *Pesti Broadway* (Budapest: Fekete Sas Kiadó, 2009).

batic dancers” who were “apparently naked except for the gold paint which covered them,” trapeze artists, and a Folies Bergère-style performance aptly titled “The Blue Danube.” The small dance stage was crowded with patrons quenching their thirst with premium liquors, wine, and cocktails. Among the most popular cocktails was “The Prince of Wales” (apricot brandy, Canadian rye whisky, bitters, a splash of water, and sugar, garnished with orange peels). It was rumored to have been invented by the Prince of Wales, who, before becoming King Edward VIII, visited the country on numerous occasions.¹³³

While the municipal and state governments could not take credit for late-night entertainment, they certainly made sure that the city presented its best face after dark. Here is the best demonstration of what has been referred to as the government’s “passive role” in tourism formulation.¹³⁴ Some of the actions of the municipal and state governments might not have sought to impact tourism directly, but tourism indeed benefited from those actions or policies. When Horthy talked about Hungarian virtues, he most certainly was not thinking of Sándor Rozsnyai’s Arizona, with scantily clad *görlök* (interwar slang, taken from the English word “girls”); the dance floor of the Parisien Grill, where the upper echelons of Hungarian society danced through the night; or of the Moulin Rouge, where the middle class came to forget about its day.¹³⁵ Yet the government did not ban the offerings of these private businesses. One British traveler noted that in Budapest, restaurants and cabarets stayed open until the morning hours and had freedoms that were not allowed even in London.¹³⁶ Budapest nightlife greatly benefited from the city’s infrastructure. It was not until 1929 that the municipal government initiated a comprehensive program

¹³³ John Brophy, *Ilonka Speaks of Hungary: Personal Impressions and Interpretation of the National Character* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1936), 130–33 and 156–57.

¹³⁴ This argument is put forward by Lickorish et al. and referenced in Hall, *Tourism and Politics*, 46. Note that Hall disagrees with this binary understanding, for to him it does not explain the complexities involved.

¹³⁵ For a short introduction to Budapest nightlife’s most significant establishments, see Andor Szigeti, András Rubovszky, and Miklós Walkó, *A magyar vendéglátás és turizmus újkori története* (Budapest: Szaktudás Kiadó Ház, 2009), 147–52.

¹³⁶ Gibbs, *European Journey*, 311.

to update and modernize the city's aging infrastructure.¹³⁷ While the program went through a number of changes, there was progress. The Chain Bridge, the Parliament building, the Royal Castle, Heroes' Square, and the Fisherman's Bastion were illuminated nightly. The city paid special attention to public safety by improving street lighting. In 1926, Budapest spent 529,582 pengő (approx. \$1,249,000) on public lighting. By 1938 the annual cost neared one-and-a-half million pengő (approx. \$4,166,000). A city official declared that this improvement was absolutely necessary for the city to claim the status of a metropolis, for in the grand cities of the world, "lighting has the same role as the reflector-light has on a stage, it bathes the main characters in light. [Since] Budapest, the Queen of the Danube, is this sort of leading character among the metropolises of Europe; it must be bathed in a sea of light before the world."¹³⁸

Budapest indeed offered nightlife and entertainment on par with Berlin or Paris. It lived up to its billing as a cosmopolitan and modern city. Yet it was also the historic capital city, and there were tours and activities illustrating its history. They emphasized the "storied and heroic struggle" of the Hungarians, highlighting the achievements of St. Stephen and Budapest's role in the defense of the Christian West against the Ottoman Empire. The St. Stephen's Day celebration in August and the spring festivals gained increasing notice abroad. Automobile and bus tours were carefully mapped so the visitor would not see the shadier side of the city, its working districts, and its deprived outskirts. IBUSZ's discounted tour, "Three Days in Budapest," was especially successful, and by the mid-1930s, as the global impact of the Great Depression lessened, Budapest featured more often on the itineraries of European travelers.

The countryside was promoted as a different face of Hungary, almost the direct opposite of Budapest. The promotion, largely based on the *pusztá* romanticism of the past, highlighted Hungary's romantic, traditional, and exotic Eastern features. Many Hungarians viewed the essence of Hungarianness as something that was rooted in the country-

¹³⁷ For more, see András Sipos, "Budapest városfejlesztési programja, 1930–1948," *Múltunk* 50, no. 1 (2005): 148–209.

¹³⁸ Árpád Halász, *Budapest húsz éve, 1920–1939: fejlődéstörténeti tanulmány* (Budapest: Wolff Károly Emlékbizottság, 1939), 270–72.

side and its people. Right-wing and conservative intellectuals, artists, and politicians spoke out against the fast pace of modernization and the erosion of traditional Hungarian values, which they saw as localized in the countryside. Their anxiety about the disappearance of rural life, its traditions, and its impact on the national character made them oppose nearly everything that Budapest symbolized.

The quintessential physical landscape of Hungarianness was the Great Plain of Eastern Hungary, the Alföld. Cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Tamás Hofer argues that in the early to mid-nineteenth century, “when Hungarians worked out their modern national identity, they wanted most of all to be different from Austrians. If the Austrians idealized the Alps’ mountainous peaks, then the Hungarians chose the flatness of the Great Hungarian Plain as their ‘national landscape.’”¹³⁹ Perhaps nothing illustrated this distinction better than the first two stanzas from Hungary’s revolutionary writer, Sándor Petőfi, in his 1844 poem *Az Alföld*.

With your pines, with your scenic regions,
Rough Carpathians, you are nothing to me!
Perhaps I am amazed by you, but I do not like you
And my imagination does not roam your mountains-valleys.

Down in the ocean smooth regions of the Alföld
I am at home; my world is there.
If I see the endlessness of the plains
My eagle soul escapes from its prison.¹⁴⁰

The Great Hungarian Plain—and Eastern Hungary in general—was the home of Hungary’s native lesser nobility. Among the most famous of this stratum was Lajos Kossuth, born in Monok, in the Tokaj region. Eastern Hungary, and especially the Hungarian Plains, was associated

¹³⁹ Tamás Hofer, “Construction of the ‘Folk Cultural Heritage in Hungary’ and the Rival Version of National Identity,” in *Hungarians between “East” and “West”: Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 41–43.

¹⁴⁰ Sándor Petőfi, “Az Alföld,” in *Sándor Petőfi: His Entire Poetic Works*, trans. Frank Szomy (Boca Raton, FL: n.a., 1972), 74.

with the East in more than just geographical terms. Hungary's eastern region was often linked with the Reformation and the religious and national struggle against the Catholic Habsburg dynasty. Peasants, herdsman, and shepherds were other dominant features of the Great Plains (see Figure 3).

They were the ones who, despite modernization, were able to retain the original and essential Eastern traits of the Magyars, so went the argument. The crown of Eastern Hungary was the Hortobágy, the *puszta*. This natural grassland represented an antithesis to noisy, hectic, and enclosed Budapest, and it was presented as the "empire of quiet, rest, and freedom."¹⁴¹

In juxtaposition to modern Budapest stood the *puszta* and its people, symbolizing the supposed uniqueness and individuality of Hungary and Hungarian culture. It was presented as a time-travel-like experience whereby, as *Hungaria Magazin* described it, the "desk-bound spirit of the slave-driven town dweller finds utter peace in the intense silence and the feeling of boundless liberty."¹⁴² It was a haven for hunters and lovers of nature. The Hortobágy was represented as the Wild West (or rather, the Wild East) of Europe, untouched by modern life, and the land—like its people—preserved in pristine natural beauty. The aforementioned travelogue of Tiltman depicts an American diplomat from Texas who traveled each year to the *puszta* to "recapture its majesty," "with its emptiness unbroken, save for herds of cattle, its nomad horses, and an occasional well"—almost exactly as the aforementioned cover art painted it.¹⁴³ Was there really a Texan, or was this only Tiltman's way of illustrating what he called "the primitive [!] appeal in that mighty expanse, which even a man born under the shadows of the eternal hills can appreciate"?¹⁴⁴ Tiltman might simply have been taking artistic license, but the feeling and emotion he conveyed was something that Hungarians promoting the *puszta* would certainly have appreciated.

The countryside, steeped in Christian tradition—notwithstanding confessional divisions—stood in contrast to Budapest's secular, cosmo-

¹⁴¹ *Hungaria Magazin*, June 1937, 13.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Tiltman, *European Excursions*, 192–93.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

politan, and Jewish character. Here the traveler did not find crowded and noisy coffee houses. One did not drink champagne and cocktails; instead one visited the *csárda* (village tavern), where the locals gathered to drink the wines of the plains. If the cowboy was the quintessential inhabitant of the American Wild West, then the *csikós* was the living embodiment of Hungary's Wild East.

Even color had the function of intensifying and illustrating the gap between Budapest and the countryside. The extravagant collage of colors was contrasted with the urban drabness. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the folk costumes of the country women who, in every way, were the antithesis of the women of Budapest (see Figure 4). Unlike her Budapest counterpart, she was portrayed as someone content with traditional life and in harmony with nature.

The *matyó* people, with their highly ornamented and vibrantly colored dresses, became the ideal type of what Hungarian propaganda represented as Hungary's unique folk culture. Centered on the town of Mezőkövesd, the *matyó* tradition emerged in the late nineteenth century. The timing is not really all that surprising. The *matyó* tradition might not enjoy the universal recognition of the kilts of the Scottish Highlands, but nevertheless, it too was the result of the Europe-wide mass production of tradition. As Hugh Trevor-Roper, Terence Ranger, and Eric Hobsbawm have shown, most of the folk traditions we think of as timeless representations of a certain national group were in fact "invented" and "discovered" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as part of converging social and political movements connected with the nation-building project.¹⁴⁵

In 1857 the clothing of Mezőkövesd represented the simplicity of the Hungarian peasant class and eschewed colors almost entirely. But by the 1885 National Exhibition, Mezőkövesd folk culture, with its highly ornamented dresses and "oriental cacophony of colors"—as contemporaries described it—was one of the central pieces of the display.¹⁴⁶ There were three reasons for this metamorphosis. The first was

¹⁴⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁴⁶ Iván Kápolnai, "A matyóság népességi viszonyai a 19. és a 20. században," in *Eredmények és feladatok a matyóság néprajzi kutatásában*, ed. Ilona Viszóczy (Mezőkövesd and Miskolc: Herman Ottó Múzeum, 2006), 65.

nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalists' desire to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Magyars vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, especially Austrians. Second, it was a response to modernization and modernity associated with the newly developing bourgeoisie, who in general were of non-Magyar origin. And lastly, there was the peasants' own efforts to enrich their culture with colors and ornaments hitherto characteristic of the Magyar nobility. According to national activists, at the heart of Hungarian distinctiveness were the "folk soul" and its "Asian love of pomp." As Tamás Hofer argues, "colourful clothing, richly elaborated wedding rituals and other village festivals . . . were turned into supposed proofs of Asian or Eastern identity."¹⁴⁷

In post-Trianon Hungary, politicians, intellectuals, and tourism professionals certainly appreciated the value of folk culture and tradition. In 1921 the Catholic prelate and parliamentary delegate Sándor Giesswein argued that it was everyone's duty to "dig up and preserve the traditions of the past." As an example, he offered Mezőkövesd and Sweden. During his visit to Sweden, he had been duly impressed by the fact that Swedish women did not follow the latest Parisian fashions but preferred to wear their folk costumes as everyday clothing. He argued that in Hungary this sort of commitment could only be found in Mezőkövesd, where folk traditions and craftsmanship were still alive. To further the development, he suggested making folk craft mandatory in schools for both girls and boys.¹⁴⁸

In a special symposium organized by the progressive literary journal *Nyugat* ("West" in Hungarian), intellectuals and industry experts gathered to discuss the state of Hungarian tourism. Here the contemporary literary giant Zsigmond Móricz argued that the role of the countryside in tourism needed to be re-evaluated. While ambivalent about the idea of mass tourism—he referred to it as a mass epidemic—he too realized its value and argued that incorporating the countryside into the tourist itinerary required more investment. In his opinion, the habit of "blasting the visitors by showing our Trianon wounds" was not beneficial, for it did not earn sympathy. Instead, he put his faith in the supposed Hungarian hospitality, which he argued

¹⁴⁷ Hofer, "Construction," 44.

¹⁴⁸ *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, vol. 10, 1920, 261 (June 9, 1921).

was a national trait from the times of St. Stephen, as the basic building block of tourism.¹⁴⁹

Mezőkövesd, among other rural destinations, was where Hungarian folk heritage was (re)produced, ceremonies performed, and rituals staged to showcase traditional and nationalist themes.¹⁵⁰ Once again, Béla Mátéka's manuscript provides evidence of the first steps taken to incorporate the countryside into the tourist flow. In 1923 the village association of Mezőkövesd organized a day of exhibitions and culture. The organizers contacted Mátéka at the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office. With considerable difficulty, he gathered about thirty foreigners and took a train to the village. They enjoyed a full day of festivities that included meals and wine in the *csárda*, gypsy music, and *matyó* dance.¹⁵¹ After this modest beginning, by the 1930s, Mezőkövesd and the *matyó* became an important stop for thousands of travelers providing "genuine Hungarian atmosphere."¹⁵² The population's private life was transformed and restaged for visitors to provide a "genuine" Hungarian entertainment. This was not limited to weddings and festivals; even saint's-day celebrations and Sunday masses were choreographed to showcase their supposed authentic piety to guests.¹⁵³ Among those enjoying "exotic entertainment"—as the foremost *matyó* expert Márta Fügedi explained—were the duke and duchess of Windsor, the maharaja of Indore, the royal couple of Siam, and a writer for *National Geographic*.¹⁵⁴ IBUSZ organized special automobile tours and arranged a reduced-fare train service (*filléres vonatok*)—similar to the Italian example of *treno popolare*—to this and other provincial destinations, such as the wine regions of Tokaj and

¹⁴⁹ *Idegenforgalom—Nyugat konferencia, 1932 december 7*, <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/nyugat.htm> (accessed May 21, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ I borrowed this language from Tim Endesor's "Performing Tourism, Staging Tourism: (Re)producing Tourist Space and Practice," *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 59–81.

¹⁵¹ Mátéka, "A székesfőváros idegenforgalmi propagandája," n.p.

¹⁵² The original line in the IBUSZ program guide was "tösgyökeres magyar hangulat." Quoted in Márta Fügedi, *Mítosz és valóság: a matyó népművészet* (Miskolc: Herman Ottó Múzeum, 1997), 127.

¹⁵³ Fügedi, *Mítosz és valóság*, 91–101.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 135–37.

Eger, so visitors could experience the tranquility of the countryside and its peasant traditions.

Despite this relative success, critics did not fail to point out that the picture of the Great Plains was highly romanticized, unrealistic, and stereotypical. The brochures and propaganda failed to mention the poverty and shortages that also characterized the region. In Mezőkövesd, for example, the Hungarian Royal Railways and the Budapest Metropolitan Tourist Office opened a guest hostel, Matyó House, which claimed to offer an “authentic” *matyó* experience for sixty to seventy tourists per night. In 1936 alone there were 7,000 signatures in the guest book.¹⁵⁵ Opponents of the project referred to it as a “Potemkin Pub” and argued that this and similar developments did not address the real-life problems of country folk. Instead, they offered an over-sexualized pseudo-experience where young women were “served up” to older gentlemen and young men to foreign ladies, together with alcohol, and danced the *csárdás*.¹⁵⁶ Some argued that these activities actually exacerbated existing problems by commercializing the traditional lifestyle, which critics feared would ultimately lead to the disappearance of real traditions.¹⁵⁷

The third component of the tourist image of Hungary focused on Lake Balaton and, to a lesser degree, the provincial cities. This image aimed to combine progress and modernity with the natural beauty of the countryside. Lake Balaton—“the Hungarian Sea”—is the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe. It is about forty-eight miles long and averages six miles in width. It is possible to enjoy the lake from the end of May to the end of September.

The “discovery” of Balaton for tourism dates back to the early nineteenth century. As Emőke Kovács argues, it was in the first third of the century that the lake appeared in literature, providing a subject or setting for the likes of Dániel Berzsenyi and Mihály Vörösmarty.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Zoltán Szabó's sociographic study, quoted in Fügedi, *Mítosz és valóság*, 131.

¹⁵⁷ Jusztin, “A turizmus története a két világháború között Magyarországon,” 102.

¹⁵⁸ For a more comprehensive study of the lake in the nineteenth century, including its role in Hungary's Reform Age, see Emőke Kovács, *A 19. századi Balaton világa* (Budapest: Széphalom Könyvműhely, 2007).

Transportation to and on the lake remained sporadic. With the exception of the Festetics family and their sailboats, including the iconic *Phoenix*, there was very little activity, commercial or for pleasure, on the lake. As one British traveler noted,

It is difficult for an Englishman to imagine a fine inland lake of this kind, totally useless for the purposes of commerce or pleasure. I believe there is not a single trading barge, and certainly not one sailing-boat on the whole lake! There never was a people who had less natural disposition to navigation than the Hungarians.¹⁵⁹

The great names of nineteenth-century Hungarian history, Lajos Kossuth and István Széchenyi, promoted shipping on the lake and, by 1845, established an organization designed to support steamboat traffic. The first paddle-wheel steamboat, the *Kisfaludy*, plied the water the next year. The growth of beach culture around Lake Balaton also lagged.¹⁶⁰ While the English seaside experienced a major transformation at the end of the eighteenth century, the first organized attempt to transform Lake Balaton took place only in 1873 under the auspices of the Spa Joint-Stock Company of Almád (Almádi Fürdő Részvénytársaság).¹⁶¹ The completion of the Southern Line (a railway connection that included the entire southern shore of the lake) in the same year helped the region's development, but for the most part, growth remained sporadic. In the late 1880s the first major hotels were

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Béla Czére, "Vitorlások és gőzösök," *História* 21, nos. 5–6 (1999): 21. For the original, see John Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania with Remarks on Their Conditions, Social, Political, and Economical*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1839), 263.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Kósa, *Fürdőélet a monarchiában*, 46–51. On the development of European beach culture, especially that of England and Spain, see John K. Walton, "Consuming the Beach: Seaside Resorts and the Cultures of Tourism in England and Spain from 1840s to the 1930s," in *Being Elsewhere*, 272–98. Similarly belated—during the late nineteenth century—was the discovery of Russian Crimea. See Louise McReynolds, "The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist: Commercialization in the Nineteenth Century," in *Turizm*, 17–43 (especially 34–42).

built in Siófok, a desirable destination because of its proximity to Budapest. The first scientific attempts to study the lake were a result of the 1891 establishment of the Hungarian Geographic Society's Balaton Committee (Magyar Földrajzi Társaság Balaton Bizottsága) under the leadership of Lajos Lóczy. Further development continued, including the construction of the northern line, which, unlike the southern line, was government-sponsored and completed in 1909.¹⁶² Nevertheless, until the end of World War I, there was little or no sustained government interest in the lake's tourist potential.

With Trianon, Hungary lost its connection to the Adriatic and hence to the resort towns of Istria; thus Lake Balaton gained more significance. Between 1921 and 1927, the number of lake villas grew from 1,960 to 3,236. Simultaneously, the development of beach culture and Balaton's tourism came into the purview of the government. By 1928 the government financed the building of the Balaton highway, opened new harbors and a regular ferry service, and established a permanent research institute at Tihany for the scientific study of the lake.¹⁶³ All this was a result of what Péter Sipos argues was the first comprehensive state-level concept for lake development. The program was launched with a propaganda campaign on August 5, 1928, under the patronage of Horthy himself.¹⁶⁴ In order to regulate and enhance the development of beach culture, the Council of Ministers established the Royal Balaton Management Committee (Királyi Balatoni Intéző Bizottság, or Kirbib) in April 1928. The president of Kirbib, Lajos Körmendy Ékes, pointed out the two main goals of the committee. First, it wanted to improve the quality of the lake settlements. This required a great deal of new investment in infrastructure, water and drainage systems, road building, and the establishment of new harbors, as well as new hotel developments and uniform guidelines for all waterfront development. Second, Kirbib addressed the issue of prices. While cheaper than the Italian or French Riviera, the prices around Lake Balaton were higher than elsewhere in the country. Because of the short season, restaurant

¹⁶² Zsuzsa Frisnyák, "Utazás a Balaton körül," *História* 21, nos. 5–6 (1999): 41.

¹⁶³ Lajos Körmendy Ékes, "Balatoni feladatok," *Magyar Szemle*, June 1929, 160–61.

¹⁶⁴ Péter Sipos, "Élet a Balatonnál a két világháború között," *História* 21, nos. 5–6 (1999): 43.

and hotel owners aimed to make up for lost time with higher prices, which harmed both domestic and foreign tourism.¹⁶⁵ The development of the 125-mile-long shoreline greatly benefited from the regulations of Act XVI of 1929, which empowered a government body to designate and appropriate land for holiday resorts.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, government and industry circles had very high hopes for Lake Balaton. The once-unimportant body of water and its environs were now a “national treasure” comparable in significance only to Budapest. The question of Lake Balaton was widely discussed in the Parliament, where members argued that the development of the lake as a resort area would enable foreigners to view Hungary as a nation with a highly developed culture rather than a land populated by shepherds on the *puszta*.¹⁶⁶ They demanded the modernization of hotels, and some even went so far as to insist that the perfect model should be the Lido of Venice and its Grand Hotel Excelsior.¹⁶⁷ The government allocated an annual 150,000 pengő for fifteen years to finance further improvements. Parliamentary members also demanded better advertising for the lake and berated Hungarian newspapers and film stars for promoting foreign destinations, such as Biarritz and Monte Carlo on the French Riviera or San Remo in Italy, instead of Lake Balaton.¹⁶⁸

Promotional materials often depicted Lake Balaton as the “play-ground of Hungary,” where sports, from waterskiing and sailing to car racing and tennis, were available along with beautiful women. “*Sport in Sonne, Luft und Wasser*” (sport in sun, air, and water), read the German tagline promotion of the special Balaton edition of *Hungaria Magazin*. On the cover a well-dressed woman on the sailboat suggested refined and active entertainment (see Figure 5). However, this playground also offered something else. Juxtaposed with the modern, chic, and elegant lady of the cover was the photo collage of beautiful swimwear-clad women—with the tagline “She . . . and the Balaton” in three languages—hinting at the promise of romantic encounters.¹⁶⁹ Male

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 162–65.

¹⁶⁶ *Képviseelőházi Napló*, vol. 2, 1935, 377 (June 6, 1935).

¹⁶⁷ *Képviseelőházi Napló*, vol. 17, 1927, 342 (February 7, 1929).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ *Hungaria Magazin* (May 1938), 10–13.

perspectives predominated in tourism promotion and advertisements everywhere. Some historians have pointed out that in such promotions, women were often “associated with passivity, availability, and being owned,” and places and destinations were presented “for the gratification and pleasure of the normatively male tourist.”¹⁷⁰

Foreign travelers certainly saw it this way. Like his nineteenth-century French counterpart Victor Tissot, Frank Carpenter had something to say about the female population of the country. He wrote: “The women are especially beautiful; more beautiful, I think, than any I have seen elsewhere. They have olive complexions, dark, luxuriant hair, and great dark eyes. They walk with a swing, and they have fine figures.”¹⁷¹ Hungarian tourism promoters themselves embraced such a vision, as magazines and travel brochures continued to impress upon the readers the image of beautiful and sensual Hungarian women:

Good-looking women of all classes are to be found in the crowds: elegantly clad ladies of the highest aristocracy, not less handsome women of the wealthy middle class, fashionable actresses, representative members of the plutocracy, business girls, midinettes and stylish mannequins, all mingle in the delightful kaleidoscope for the onlookers, walking aimlessly up and down . . . watched and criticised by the men of leisure of the corresponding classes.¹⁷²

Balaton was promoted not only to those with healthy and beautiful bodies. On the contrary, the supposed “invigorating” medical benefit of Balaton, similar to a “gigantic bathroom with radioactive waters,” made the lake perfect for the “frail and sick” and was the “best possible remedy for weak children,” according to an English-language bulletin of the Hungarian National Tourist Board.¹⁷³ Lake Balaton was also publicized as a paradise for amateur pilots and car enthusiasts.

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Craik, “The Culture of Tourism,” in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, ed. Chris Rojek and John Urry (New York: Routledge, 1997), 129–31.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷² Municipal Information Office, *Budapest*, 5.

¹⁷³ “A Lake Which Acts Like the Sea,” *Hungarian Tourist News*, no. 6 (June 1934): 5–6.

Along the shoreline, the larger cities of Siófok, Balatonfüred, and Keszthely offered cultural and culinary programs. Keszthely, known as the “Capital of the Hungarian Sea,” resurrected its nineteenth-century multi-week cultural festival, the “Helikon”—named after the mythic Mount Helicon, home of the Greek muses. The city, which Hungarians dubbed the “Hungarian Zurich” and “Little Weimar,” also offered summer seminars and shorter holiday courses to foreigners on a variety of topics. Among the courses presented in English, German, French, and Italian were “Hungary and European Culture,” “Periods of Hungarian Humanism,” or “The Hungarian Spirit in Our Epic Poems.”¹⁷⁴ In 1934 the local newspaper proudly proclaimed in a headline: “We are starting to be fashionable.”¹⁷⁵ The following year, the town reported a 240 percent rise in tourist traffic.¹⁷⁶

Balaton was also promoted as a destination for a newly developing type of tourism: village tourism. The Országos Magyar Weekend Egyesület (National Hungarian Weekend League) and the Kirbib published material to educate those involved in this emerging facet of tourism. While the main targets of village tourism were Hungarians, English-language articles such as the “Romance of Lake Balaton” promoted a different, more traditional, and relaxing side of the Hungarian Sea by focusing on the “beautifully wooded slopes, valleys, and vineyards” of the northern shore and the natural setting of the lake.

Various travel organizations, led by IBUSZ, organized excursions and longer tours to Balaton. They offered “two for one” coupons and arranged discounted trains to various destinations on the shoreline. According to the local Keszthely newspaper, in 1932 two discounted trains brought 1,738 passengers to the town.¹⁷⁷ Balaton was portrayed in travel exhibitions and world’s fairs as one of the centers of Hungarian tourism. Travel posters and brochures in various languages promoted Lake Balaton as the beach destination for all. For example, the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club organized tours to the Balaton with guaranteed quality service and the best prices in selected gas and service stations. On the other hand, romanticized, poetic descriptions

¹⁷⁴ *Balatonica* (special collection)—1596, Helikon Library, Keszthely.

¹⁷⁵ *Keszthelyi Hírlap*, March 18, 1934, 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Keszthelyi Hírlap*, February 27, 1935, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Keszthelyi Hírlap*, September 18, 1932, 7.

of the lake's beauty appeared in magazines. Scientific works on its flora and fauna were translated and distributed worldwide.

Statistics offer a somewhat misleading picture of the success or failure of the Balaton project. According to 1932 statistics, during the year 2,395 foreigners spent 93,220 nights at the lake. By 1937 the number of foreign tourists grew to 13,084 and the nights spent grew to 175,125.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, statistics for Balaton do not indicate if those foreign travelers were ethnic Hungarians visiting from neighboring countries or Czechs, Slovaks, and Romanians. Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that the number of tourists rose. Despite the growing number of beachgoers and the unquestionable improvements, Balaton's tourism remained hampered by insufficient infrastructure, seasonal limitations, and an inadequate beach culture. As a tool of foreign policy, Balaton's contribution, while not entirely insignificant, did not live up to its billing. The Kirbib realized the need for future development, and in 1938 it produced a five-year plan calling for the restructuring of the region's agriculture, modernization of transportation, expansion of infrastructure, preservation of cultural and historical sites, and the establishment of museums and cultural centers. The entire plan required an investment of twenty million pengő. Because of the changing political climate and the looming war, this grand plan was not implemented.¹⁷⁹

Other places in the countryside also enjoyed the benefits of tourism. The mountain resort of Lillafüred, a personal project of Prime Minister István Bethlen and thus a rather controversial topic in Parliament, filled the void left by the lost resorts of the Tatra Mountains. The grandiose plan called for the drilling of a thermal spring and the organization of an international film festival, neither of which was fully realized. In 1931 the city of Szeged organized its first Open Air Performance, a festival that gained a Europe-wide reputation, and like its model, the Salzburg Festspiele, entertained large audiences. The repertoire included Imre Madách's drama *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*), Zoltán Kodály's folk opera *Háry János*, and

¹⁷⁸ Statistics in Jusztin, "A turizmus története a két világháború között Magyarországon," 92–93. Others, like Peter Sipos, show that the number of foreign visitors in 1937 was as many as 33,000.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

performances of Puccini's *Turandot*. The KÜM press division provided tickets and transportation for the foreign media, which included representatives from Reuters, the *New York Times*, and the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps the most prominent cultural-diplomatic achievement was the Fourth International World Scout Jamboree, held in 1933 at the Royal Palace of Gödöllő. This was quite a coup for Hungary, since it was only the third country (after England and Denmark) to host this international gathering. Newspapers worldwide reported that Regent Horthy and the founder of the Scouts, Lord Baden-Powell, and chief Hungarian scout Pál Teleki welcomed the nearly 30,000 scouts attending.¹⁸¹

The three different landscapes and the meanings they carried divided intellectuals, politicians, and tourism experts. Yet under the government's watchful eye, all three images of Hungary—and visions of Hungarianness—were utilized. The government assisted the development of all three with various degrees of financial, legislative, and moral support.¹⁸² An undated pamphlet titled "Fairy Tales Become True: Come and See Hungary" from the Hungarian embassy in London gives a sense of the type of propaganda that resulted from the interplay of images and ideals:

It is hard to avoid using what may seem extravagant language when writing about Hungary. Europe is awakening to the fact that Hungary is an inviting and rewarding field of travel for tourists seeking something new and different in the way of holiday experience.

Hungary was once a powerful and big country. Now she is dismembered, reduced to one third of her prewar size, yet in spite of this, the Magyars have preserved the nation's age old traditions, intellectual supremacy and moral integrity, thus maintaining their spiritual unity with Western Civilization.

¹⁸⁰ MOL K66, 378. csomó III/6 (various).

¹⁸¹ Among the newspapers were the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and the *Times* (London).

¹⁸² MOL K106, 174. csomó 139. tétel (August 24, 1934).

In order to become acquainted with Hungary, a country as yet insufficiently known, one has to study the history of the country to learn the special character of Hungary's culture.

Creation of art, natural beauty; the modern life of Budapest, the world's greatest health resort; the unique vision of the Hungarian prairie, the gay colours of the picturesque national costumes and, last but not least, the proverbial Hungarian hospitality await you, thus making your holiday a delightful and never to be forgotten experience.

So come to Hungary and prepare for a voyage such as you have never before even dreamed of.¹⁸³

Starting in the late 1920s, despite the effects of the Great Depression, the Hungarian tourism industry steadily expanded. By the mid-1930s it started to show that, the continuing discussion and debate over the "real" Hungarian tourist image notwithstanding, the tourist industry was more than merely an economic concern.

1938: Hopes, Disappointments, and Change

The crowning achievement of Hungarian tourism and the ultimate representation of the country took place in 1938, designated as the Year of St. Stephen to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the death of Hungary's first king. Tourism professionals and politicians looked forward to 1938 with great hope—hope ultimately unfulfilled. What was supposed to be a crowning achievement actually signaled the beginning of decline and led to another restructuring of the Hungarian tourist industry. In accordance with shifting national priorities, it was no longer Árpád and his chieftains who represented Hungarianness. It was St. Stephen—Hungary's first warrior-king—who became the central historical figure worthy of celebration (see Figure 6).

¹⁸³ MOL K92, 23. csomó, 19. tétel (London Embassy, n.d.)

The Year of St. Stephen was designed as the ultimate display of Hungary's *bona fides* as a European nation and the definitive demonstration of its Christian character, proving that Christianity was a central element of Hungarian national identity. Despite confessional divisions (Eastern Hungary was largely Protestant, while the west of the country was mostly Catholic), Christianity had a unifying impact by focusing on the country's role in defending Western Christendom against the tides of non-Christian invaders. Western Christendom was also closely connected with the question of Hungary's European credentials by the decision of its founder and first king, St. Stephen, to accept the crown from the Catholic Church—so the argument went.

The central celebration event was the Thirty-Fourth International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest. The first main gathering of the world's Catholics to celebrate the Eucharist was held in 1881 in Lille, France. After World War I, Rome, Amsterdam, Chicago, Sydney, Tunis, Dublin, and Manila hosted the event.¹⁸⁴ The idea to hold the Eucharistic Congress in Hungary arose in 1929; its main organizer was Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary. He recalled that his "struggle" to secure Hungary as the host of the 1938 congress was especially difficult, for the country was not a massive nation but a "small and humiliated" one. In addition, he feared the "un-Christian behavior" of other nations, particularly of the "successor states," for he believed that they would be able to "scuttle" (*megfúr*) the Hungarian plans (with the assistance of France).¹⁸⁵ Both secular and religious leaders realized the significance of the event. Zsigmond Mihalovics, canon and director of the Congress, emphasized the importance of the event in the fight against atheism—perhaps a barely concealed reference to Bolshevism. He also pointed out that Hungary had to make the best of this "special propaganda occasion," for "never before have we had a similar opportunity to showcase ourselves to foreigners in a more sympathetic way."¹⁸⁶ In 1937 Prime Minister Kálmán

¹⁸⁴ Jenő Gergely, *Eucharisztikus világkongresszus Budapesten—1938* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1988), 22–28.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

¹⁸⁶ Zsigmond Mihalovics, "A budapesti eucharisztikus kongresszus jelentősége," in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1937), 41.

Darányi and Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya visited Adolf Hitler. On this occasion Darányi informed Hitler that Regent Horthy—although himself a Protestant—hoped Hitler would not put obstacles in the way of German pilgrims wishing to attend the Congress. The Führer's answer was evasive and conditional on the state of the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Vatican.¹⁸⁷

Hungarian and international religious and secular leaders attended the opening ceremony in May. Among them were Regent Horthy and his wife, a Catholic who served as the patroness of the event, and Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, as the representative of the Holy See. Cardinal Pacelli (who later, in March 1939, became Pope Pius XII), in his opening remarks, paid tribute to Hungary as the shield of Christendom and defender of Christian civilization. Using the example of Hungary's earlier struggle against the "Turkish infidels," the cardinal emphasized that Christendom was once again in danger and called for its defense "against the leaders of religious negation and of social revolution."¹⁸⁸ The clear danger was Bolshevism. However, in the wake of the *Anschluss*, just two months earlier, the looming danger of Nazi Germany was considerable. Hanebrink correctly argues that both Hungarians and the Vatican viewed the Budapest Congress "as an event at once anti-Communist and antifascist."¹⁸⁹ The Eucharistic Congress came to an end on May 28, 1938, and the following day saw the official launch of the Year of St. Stephen.

St. Stephen's Year—which included the traditional St. Stephen's Week and St. Stephen's Day—cannot be divorced from the celebration of Hungarian statehood. Despite its religious overtones, it was also a secular celebration of the ideals and history of the Kingdom of Hungary and its first king. Moreover, the patron of the 1938 festivities was Regent Horthy. The festivities were central events in Hungarian tourism, with programs designed to satisfy tourists of every kind.

Much of the program was the continuation of earlier-established practices of the traditional August 20 St. Stephen's Day festivities and those of the 1930 St. Imre's Year. St. Imre, or Emeric, was the son of St. Stephen. He died at the age of twenty-four in a hunting acci-

¹⁸⁷ Gergely, *Eucharisztikus világtkongresszus*, 77.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Hanebrink, *In Defense*, 145.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

dent. The 900th anniversary of his death, designated the Year of St. Imre, was in many ways a dress rehearsal for the 1938 celebration of St. Stephen. It included the performances of the Gyöngyös Bokréta (Pearly Bouquet), a performance group devoted to the preservation and promotion of folk culture. The group enjoyed the moral and financial support of the government. The yearly dance performances were central to the August celebrations. They brought the traditions, sounds, and colors of the countryside to Budapest. In August 1938 the group—which included sixty different ensembles with 1,400 performers—gave twelve performances.¹⁹⁰ Throughout the years, the St. Stephen's Day celebration changed in purpose and objective. According to August 1927 statistics, there were 15,139 domestic guests, 3,210 from the “lost territories,” and 6,629 foreigners were registered in the hotels and pensions of Budapest. By contrast, ten years later there were 7,653 domestic guests, 3,084 from the “lost territories,” and 28,068 foreigners in the same Budapest venues.¹⁹¹ The absence of domestic visitors was something of which contemporary experts were keenly aware. Behind the transformation were the rising prices of Budapest accommodations and the tourist organizations' concentrated foreign propaganda. The Hungarian celebration of Hungarianness ironically became a spectacle for foreigners. Different ideas were debated on how to bring back the people of the countryside. This issue may account for the fact that in 1938, while the already popular fireworks and procession of the Holy Right Hand (the mummified right hand of St. Stephen) were retained, this holiest relic of the Hungarian Catholic Church took a cross-country tour for the first time. In the ultimate show of governmental participation, the House of Parliament temporarily relocated to Székesfehérvár, the ancient seat of the Hungarian Crown and the final resting place of fifteen Hungarian kings. It was here that the members of Parliament proclaimed Act XXIV of 1938, which made August 20 a national holiday to commemorate the life and works of St. Stephen, “the creator of the Christian Hungarian state, who laid the foundation

¹⁹⁰ *Jelentés 1938*, 26–27.

¹⁹¹ Vilmos Kovács házy, “Néhány szó a Szent-István hétről,” in *A magyar idegenforgalom évkönyve* (Budapest: Az Idegenforgalmi Újságírók Szindikátusa, 1937), 25.

of the nation's European mission."¹⁹² This was the main message of the celebrations. Like the holy year itself, it had a dual message, both religious and secular. It sought to illustrate the Christian character and traditions of the country, while at the same time it sought to emphasize the nation's equally important European character to foreigners and domestic audiences alike.

Despite government support and the best efforts of tourist organizations, 1938 failed to bring the desired results. Compared to 1937, the number of foreign visitors to Budapest declined by 20 percent. The Lake Balaton region experienced a 60 percent decline in the number of visiting foreigners. In the rest of the countryside, the number of foreign visitors dropped by 30 percent. Especially problematic was the decline in Western tourist traffic: from Austria (-48 percent), Great Britain (-48 percent), France (-42 percent), Germany (-28 percent), and the United States (-23 percent). As a result, the overall revenue from foreign tourism fell from 38.3 million pengő (1937) to 28.8 million.¹⁹³ Consequently, the tourism industry's investment in the St. Stephen Year did not yield an acceptable return. For example, a confidential report prepared by the OMIH stated that the exceptional expenditures of the St. Stephen Year and the Eucharistic Congress nearly bankrupted the organization and consumed its entire annual budget.¹⁹⁴

The drastic decline of tourism was a continent-wide phenomenon, best explained by the volatile state of international relations. Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, the growing tension in the Sudetenland, and overall fears and rumors of a coming war resulted in a general anxiety about foreign travel. Hungary was especially impacted because of its geographical location. Vienna, which for many Western tourists had been the gateway to Hungary, was lost as such. In addition, the 1937/1938 economic recession and the subsequent currency devaluations made travel less affordable.

¹⁹² Quoted in *Pesti Hírlap*, August 19, 1938, 3.

¹⁹³ Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, "Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet jelentése Magyarország idegenforgalmáról az 1938 évben" (Budapest: Magyar Gazdaságkutató Intézet, March 20, 1939), 2–3 and 9.

¹⁹⁴ MOL K69, 785. csomó "I" tétel, titled: "A megváltozott viszonyok miatt milyen feladatok várnak az Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatalra?" (March 19, 1939).

However, there were two developments that gave reason for cautious optimism and served as an impetus for some major restructuring of the Hungarian tourism industry. First, with the First Vienna Award (November 1938), parts of the Felvidék (Upper Hungary) returned to Hungary. With this decision—or dictate, as some would argue—the Hungarian tourist industry was given new possibilities. *Hungaria Magazin* wasted no time and immediately started the foreign and domestic promotion of the region. On the cover of the April 1939 issue is a picture of a Hungarian soldier, with a flower arrangement on his helmet, marching toward a medieval castle that looks like the castle of Krasznahorka or Krásna Hôrka, which after Trianon belonged to Czechoslovakia until the First Vienna Award in 1938 (see Figure 7).

This cover signaled the second changing trend of Hungarian tourism: its new emphasis on the domestic market. The newly reacquired territories and the growing numbers of domestic tourists led to new debate about the need to prioritize the domestic traveler even at the expense of his/her foreign counterpart. Discussions about changes necessitated by the recent developments reached the highest levels. The parliamentary exchange between Count György Apponyi and the minister of commerce and transportation, Antal Kunder, illustrates the tension. Apponyi expressed concerns about tourist industry's new direction, which prioritized the domestic market over the foreign one. He argued that the focus hitherto on tourism's foreign propaganda was correct, because it enabled the country to "vindicate the just nature of its cause" (meaning the revision of the treaty). While he agreed that governmental oversight was necessary, Apponyi rejected the idea that the government should follow the examples of the German *Kraft durch Freude* or the Italian *Dopolavoro* and change its focus to promote domestic working-class tourism at the expense of foreign tourism. He also voiced his dislike of the organizational and personnel changes that had taken place within the leading organs of the Hungarian tourist industry, which he believed were the result of an unofficial Aryanization of the industry.¹⁹⁵ In his reply, Minister Kunder reassured the House that the government sought to improve both domestic and foreign tourism and categorically rejected the idea that any kind of Aryaniza-

¹⁹⁵ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. 23, 1935, 70–73 (March 1, 1939).

tion was taking place within the leading organs of the industry. While no Jews had lost their position within the OMIH, he would not explain the circumstances behind the personnel changes.¹⁹⁶ One can only speculate about the real reasons, but it is important to note that nearly two months after this exchange, the Second Hungarian Anti-Jewish Law (Act IV of 1939) limited to 6 percent the number of Jews allowed to be employed in public service, as well as in certain intellectual sectors. The aforementioned confidential OMIH report testifies to some of the organizational and rationale changes that the government orchestrated to address the impact of the new political climate. The highest organ of Hungarian tourism was to be the newly established Tourist Propaganda Work Association (Idegenforgalmi Propaganda Munkaközösség), which oversaw and regulated the entire industry's propaganda both home and abroad. The report acknowledges a number of challenges, including international tensions, political aversion, currency issues, passport and visa difficulties, the absence of American travelers because of the New York World's Fair, covert governmental restrictions on foreign travel, and rumors and anxiety in general.¹⁹⁷

Hungarian tourist propaganda had not entirely given up on foreign tourists. The new campaign aimed to restore confidence in Hungarian travel by emphasizing the peaceful characteristics of the country. Tourist propaganda, much like cultural diplomacy in general, targeted the U.S. public. A special edition of *Hungaria Magazin*, distributed at the New York World's Fair, in addition to noting that Hungary was about the size of Maryland, stressed that in this country, which suffered throughout its "glorious history of 1000 years," now only "the ancient stones recount the history of the past," for "the people themselves think only of the future: a future of freedom in a peaceful Europe."¹⁹⁸ The cover art of the magazine, depicting a Hungarian woman dressed in folk clothing setting free the dove of peace, sought to reinforce this message of peacefulness (see Figure 8).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 74–76.

¹⁹⁷ MOL K69, 785. csomó "I" tétel, titled: "A megváltozott viszonyok miatt milyen feladatok várnak az Országos Magyar Idegenforgalmi Hivatalra?" (March 19, 1939).

¹⁹⁸ *Hungaria Magazin* (Special New York World's Fair Edition, 1939), 1.

While tourism propaganda and cultural diplomacy continued to promote the idea of Hungary as a peaceful and European nation, actual foreign policy took a more belligerent stand. In March 1939 Hungarian troops occupied Carpatho-Ukraine. After the August 1940 Second Vienna Award, which granted Northern Transylvania to Hungary, Hungarian troops marched into the region. As a recent work by Balázs Ablonczy indicates, tourism played an important role in nation-building efforts, in which the Hungarian government sought to repatriate Transylvania back into the Hungarian imagination.¹⁹⁹

To aid this process, MALÉRT (Hungarian Airline) developed domestic routes from Budapest to Nagyvárad (Oradea), Kolozsvár (Cluj), and Arad.²⁰⁰ As Hungary entered the war, Hungarian tourism promotion became limited and almost entirely inward-looking. Just as cultural diplomacy lost its reason to exist, so did the foreign promotion of Hungarian tourism.

Conclusion

From the mid-1920s, the growth of Hungarian tourism was constant. The Great Depression and the worldwide economic crisis slowed its development, but only the war ended it. An American observer might have been right when he stated that Hungary was “too remote from the centre of the European drama to excite interest” and was little more than a “piece on the diplomatic chessboard.”²⁰¹ And in the “cauldron” of interwar Europe, no amount of goodwill produced by tourism could significantly alter the country’s geopolitical reality; nor could it have realistically achieved its revisionist goals. In 1940, when Béla Markos launched the country’s first tourism-focused lecture series, where university students took classes with some of the most important industry specialists, there were still hopes that Hungary could avoid war. The

¹⁹⁹ Balázs Ablonczy, “Promoting Tourism: Hungarian Nation-Building Policies in Northern Transylvania, 1940–1944,” *Hungarian Studies Review* 36, nos. 1–2 (2009): 39–63.

²⁰⁰ Andor Szigeti, András Rubovszky, and Miklós Walkó, *A magyar vendéglátás és turizmus újkori története*, 221.

²⁰¹ Gibbs, *European Journey*, 313.

lecture series was discontinued in the spring of 1944.²⁰² On December 16 the Arizona Bar closed. Sándor Rozsnyai and Miss Arizona, who refused to divorce her Jewish husband, both disappeared, most likely as victims of the German Nazis and Hungarian fascists.²⁰³ The serene countryside around Lake Balaton became the setting for a devastating battle between German and Soviet forces. The war destroyed much of Budapest's infrastructure, its famed hotels on the banks of the Danube, and large portions of the country's transportation system.²⁰⁴ It was the new regime's duty to reconstruct the tourism industry and the image it could provide.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Their life inspired the 1987 Hungarian film *Miss Arizona*.

²⁰⁴ Andor Szigeti, András Rubovszky, and Miklós Walkó, *A magyar vendéglátás és turizmus újkori története*, 222.

Chapter 5

Becoming Audible and Visible: Radio Broadcasting and Cinematic Production in the Service of Cultural Diplomacy

“Our Lord was especially kind to us in that he gave this invention to humanity after Trianon.”

— *Miklós Kozma*, 1930¹

The invention Miklós Kozma was referring to was the radio. Kozma could have added cinema, for the development of modern media and its ability to reach worldwide audiences had an invaluable impact on Hungarian cultural diplomacy. If anyone in Hungary was aware of the propaganda potential of radio and cinema, it was Miklós Kozma. He was what today one might call a media tycoon, in charge of the Magyar Távirati Iroda (MTI; Hungarian Telegraph Bureau); founder and majority owner of the Magyar Telefon Hirmondó és Rádió Rt. (MTHR; Hungarian Telephone News Service and Radio); and creator of the Magyar Filmiroda (MFI; Hungarian Film Bureau). He was also an influential politician, serving as minister of interior in 1935–1937 and governor of Carpatho-Ukraine in 1940–1941. While Kozma’s role in Hungarian cultural diplomacy is undeniable, this chapter is not all about him. The analysis of Hungarian radio and film not only shows

¹ Miklós Kozma, quoted in “Az öt éves magyar rádió,” *Rádióélet*, October 31, 1930, 17.

the ways that these cultural products became indispensable tools in the country's cultural-diplomatic campaign, but also exposes underlying ideological and political tensions that surrounded interwar Hungarian national-identity construction.

The chapter first looks at the history of Hungarian radio from its birth to its destruction during World War II. Radio broadcasting had three goals: to provide entertainment and make money, to propagate Hungarian culture and cultural achievements abroad, and to serve as a conduit to Hungarians living outside the postwar borders. The government was intimately involved with all three aspects of this undertaking, although, as I emphasize, the Hungarian state did not have total control over radio in the way that Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, or the Soviet Union did. The recognition of radio's overt and covert utility in disseminating information and projecting an image was certainly not lost on Western democracies either.

In the case of radio, projecting an image meant, for the most part, broadcasting music. Music, as ethnomusicologist Philip V. Bohlman argues, is "malleable in the service of the nation not because it is a product of national and nationalist ideologies, but rather because music of all forms and genres can articulate the processes that shape the state," for it has the ability to "narrate national myths" and to "mark national borders."² In my analysis I adhere to Carl Dahlhaus's warning: "Any attempt to present the musical culture of an age in its entirety, with no loose ends, as a structure or structure of structures would be misguided and presumptuous."³ The chapter, therefore, does not aim to examine interwar Hungarian musical culture as a whole but only to investigate the programming in relation to the prevailing national and nationalist ideologies and their usefulness to the construction of a positive image of Hungary. Questions and debates arose about the Hungarianness of radio's music programming, with special emphasis on the role of foreign composers and genres, and more crucially, the musical production and heritage of Gypsies and Jews.

² Philip V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism: Cultural Identity and Modern History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 12.

³ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 141.

The second part looks at cinema, outlining the historical development of Hungarian cinema and, as in the case of radio, the interaction of government and government-related entities in the production of film. It examines the Hungarian “motion picture establishment,” the contribution of film professionals, critics, and government officials to the formulation of Hungarian film.⁴ For the most part, I limit my analysis to *Kulturfilme* and newsreels, two components of what had been called the “cinematic trinity.”⁵ I consciously left out feature film production (though not completely), for two reasons. First, I could not do justice to the importance and complexity of the subject in a short chapter. Second, *Kulturfilme* and newsreels were made with a foreign audience in mind, and their main purpose was to inform and educate, not to entertain and produce profit. When I write “to inform and educate,” I do so with the understanding that while newsreels and documentaries are supposed to be what film theorist Siegfried Kracauer called “the film of facts,” in the case of interwar Hungarian cinema, they were produced to convey a particular message.⁶ Kracauer says the film of facts is supposed to “record and reveal physical reality,” and the success and utility of this genre is “due to the spectator’s conviction that he is in the presence of irrefutable evidence.”⁷ Yet pictures can lie, and for that reason, just as Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs suggested in 1930, I examine the selection process that informed such productions.⁸ By analyzing the connections among genres, people, and selected themes and images, the chapter seeks to shed light on the per-

⁴ For the concept of “motion picture establishment,” see Thomas Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin, American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Thanks to Davis S. Frey for pointing me in this direction.

⁵ The third part of this trinity is feature films (or *Spielfilm*). I follow the example of Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch and refer to the genre as *Kulturfilm*, instead of using the English terminology of “cultural short.” See Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch, eds., *Cinema and the Swastika: The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15.

⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 193.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ix and 161.

⁸ Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 154.

ceived and real utility of cinematic production in cultural diplomacy and the complex nature of this undertaking.

All developed nations utilized these new instruments of mass persuasion. In Hungary, a country competing with its neighbors for world attention, radio and cinema were especially significant, and their contribution to Hungary's cultural diplomacy cannot be underestimated. They reached people beyond the physical borders of the country and, unlike academia and tourism, spoke to a much larger group. One not need be a university student or part of an intellectual circle to turn on the radio. One did not need wealth to buy a cinema ticket and take a virtual tour of the country. Practitioners of Hungarian cultural diplomacy recognized this quite early, but financial problems, political uncertainties, and deep-seated anxieties and prejudices made the use of modern media very complicated.

Radio Broadcasting: Providing Voice for a Nation

"Little copper threads are nation builders . . . the annihilation of space and time in the transmission of intelligence is a basic thing in the progress of the world," reads the 1922 *The Complete Radio Book*.⁹ In the case of Hungary, the history of these "little copper threads," the basic materials for early radio receivers, goes back to 1903, the year the Hungarian government purchased the country's first radio transceiver. The first experimental connection was achieved with antennas placed between the smokestacks of the Manfréd Weiss Works and the United Incandescent Lamp and Electric Company. The reception was poor because of the proximity of the electric streetcars. Nevertheless, the experiment aroused the interest of military and government circles in both Budapest and Vienna, marking the beginning of a long-term government focus on the potential of radio. At the beginning of World War I, the government purchased two more radio transceivers to keep a connection between Budapest, Sofia, and Istanbul in addition to the existing connection with Vienna. The war further accelerated research

⁹ Raymond Francis Yates and Louis Gerard Pacent, *The Complete Radio Book* (New York: The Century Co., 1922), 187.

in radiotelephony and wireless telegraphy. In the fall of 1921, a five-kilowatt telegraph station opened in Csepel.¹⁰ The first Hungarian broadcasting studio was actually an old furniture-moving cart that stood on Gyáli Street. The first two-kilowatt radio transmitter (later enlarged to three kilowatts), imported from Germany in January 1925, began test-broadcasting in May, four years after Pittsburgh's KDKA made the world's first public broadcast.¹¹

By 1925 the government clearly recognized the potential of radio. Archival sources indicate that from the early 1920s, Hungary's foreign consulates paid attention to this new technology. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the correspondence between the London consulate and the KÜM. Dezső Rácz, who was a foreign correspondent of MTI, pointed to the development of the new medium in Great Britain and emphasized its utility for global communication and propaganda.¹² In many ways the BBC model, "chartered by the Crown and operated for the national benefit,"¹³ provided the blueprint for Hungarian radio. The question was not whether the government should be concerned with the new medium, but to what degree. There were two international alternatives. The first was to follow the United States model, a more "chaotic" system in which radio was a private and largely unregulated enterprise. The BBC model was the more "orderly" one, for radio remained a private enterprise and enjoyed a government monopoly but was state-regulated.¹⁴ With Ministry of Commerce

¹⁰ Gusztáv Sugár, *Megszólal a rádió* (Budapest: Ajtósi Dürer Kiadó, 1993), 5. In the International System of Units, the kilowatt is the unit measuring power. In the case of radio broadcasting, it measures the power of electromagnetic output. Simply put, the more kilowatts, the farther and better-quality the transmission.

¹¹ "Tízéves magyar rádió—A Magyar Királyi Posta és a Magyar Telefon Hírmondó és Rádió Rt. együttes kiadása a Magyar Rádió fennállásának tizedik évfordulója alkalmából" (Budapest, 1935), 7–9.

¹² MOL K66, 239. csomó III/6/2 (London, March 11, 1924).

¹³ César Saerchinger, "Radio as a Political Instrument," *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 2 (January 1938): 245.

¹⁴ For more on the differences between the American and the British system, see Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–83 *passim*. It was Hilmes's characterization of "chaos" versus "order" that I employed.

order 32.250/1925, the government selected the second model. The government, retaining the right of licensing, gave the broadcasting monopoly to the newly formed MTHR under the MTI consortium. As such, the MTHR fell under the majority ownership of Hungary's media czar, Miklós Kozma. The MTHR was responsible for studios, technical apparatus, and programming, while the Hungarian Royal Postal Service supplied and maintained the broadcast system, broadcast towers, relay stations, and so on.¹⁵ The latter collected license fees from radio listeners.¹⁶ Kozma's connection to government circles partly explains the decision; however, most historians agree that Kozma unofficially agreed to fund non-radio-related governmental expenses.¹⁷

From this point on, the government's interest in and support of radio broadcasting remained constant. The first official Hungarian broadcast took place on November 30, 1925, from the MTHR's new studio, essentially a modified three-bedroom flat on Rákóczi Street. The ceremonial opening took place the next day, with Horthy and his family representing the government.¹⁸ Kozma's speech left little doubt about the role that radio was to play in Hungary's cultural-diplomatic campaign:

The arsenal of Hungarian culture has been augmented with a powerful weapon. Everybody knows the significance—especially to today's Hungary—of the fact that the Hungarian word can pass beyond our borders through these waves. Broadcasting's calling is not limited to bringing Hungarian culture to the home, but its importance is that this is the only free connection to our

¹⁵ "Tízéves magyar rádió," 10–11.

¹⁶ As a 1977 Hungarian pop song by the group LGT goes: "one had to pay for good and bad news alike."

¹⁷ See Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós* (Budapest: PolgArt, 2000), 139.

There is some indirect evidence of the MTHR's financial involvement with non-radio-related projects. For example, in the MTHR's financial report for the year 1937, 200,000 pengő (of the total expenses of approx. 5,602,000 pengő) was earmarked as "confidential expenses." MOL K429, 58. csomó 1. tétel (December 29, 1937).

¹⁸ "Tízéves magyar rádió," 10–11.

blood relatives who have been torn from us, and furthermore to demonstrate our cultural supremacy over other nations.¹⁹

Kozma added that “business considerations will be secondary to the needs of Hungarian culture.”²⁰ This was the attitude the government expected, especially because the KÜM was spending more and more energy studying the diplomatic possibilities of radio. Studies of the British broadcasting system gave government officials considerable food for thought about radio’s role in “world propaganda and world publicity.” While they realized that they could not compete with the BBC, the conclusion they drew was clear. Radio was a new tool in the “European competition for cultural propaganda,” and Hungary could not ignore this competition. The “radio is the permanent world exhibit of [our] national culture,” stated the first director of the newly established MTHR, retired lieutenant-colonel Ernő Szóts.²¹ His first challenge was to find a suitable location for a new studio. In the fall of 1928, the new palace of the radio ceremonially opened its doors in the same place where Hungarian Radio stands today. The demand for radio grew rapidly. In 1925 there were approximately 10,000 radio subscribers; by the end of 1928, the figure stood at 168,453.²² The Budapest station was on the air for ten-and-a-quarter hours every day. The next logical step was a more powerful transmitter.²³ On September 27, 1927, con-

¹⁹ Quoted in Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 138–39. See also István Salamon, ed., *Rádiótörténeti szöveggyűjtemény* (Budapest: Magyar Rádió Rt., 1999), 9.

²⁰ Quoted in István Kollega Tarsoly, ed., *Magyarország a XX. században*, vol. 3 (Szekszárd: Babits Kiadó, 1998), 355.

²¹ “Sóvárdi Szóts Ernő,” *Rádióélet*, March 14, 1930, 3. He was Kozma’s personal friend and wartime comrade, but that was not the only quality that made him the right choice. Szóts spoke a number of languages, which helped the MTHR to build international relations (the MTHR joined the International Radio Union—also known as the International Broadcasting Union—in 1926). Moreover, he was energetic and wholly committed to his role.

²² *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1929*. The reports of the MTHR general assembly are available in the Archives of the Magyar Rádió Zrt. The collection is not a public archive. I would like to thank to Hajnalka Süttheő, Tamás Sávoly, and István Salamon for their assistance.

²³ MOL K66, 239. csomó III-6/2 (London, June 28 and June 29, 1926).

struction of a new twenty-kilowatt transmitter in Lakihegy began. The new transmitter was 150 meters tall, and its two towers weighed 460 metric tons each. Broadcasting began on April 29, 1928. In November 1928, Kozma proudly noted that radio had moved to the forefront of governmental interest.²⁴

The government's interests did not come without consequences, for soon there was pressure on Kozma and company to provide programming that best served the state's agenda. But there was no consensus on how best to use this new technology. As Kozma noted in his diary, Klebelsberg saw the radio as a tool to educate the rural populace. Compromising, Kozma agreed to the idea of a free university, essentially two hours per week offering educational and agriculture-related programming.²⁵ The role of radio in Hungarian cultural diplomacy was debated on the floor of the Hungarian Diet. House Member Ákos Dencz argued that radio was such a monumental discovery that perhaps only the steam engine could compete. He pointed out that radio waves do not respect boundaries but interlink the globe, reaching shoddy huts and sparkling skyscrapers alike. As such, all nations aim to utilize radio's immense potential. It is especially important to Hungarians because, recalling an earlier remark made upon the first successful Hungarian broadcast, "we have something to say, we have pain, we have grievances; and this is what we cry through the ether, where there is no gatekeeper who can stop us."²⁶ Another representative, Gyula Petrovác, pointed in a different direction. While he agreed that radio's ability to speak to foreigners was unquestionably important, radio's other important role was to help break out from the "cultural blockade" and reach Hungarians who were living in the neighboring successor states.²⁷ Indeed, radio had three target audiences: Hungarians at home, Hungarians abroad, and foreigners elsewhere. The latter two were strongly connected with the country's cultural-diplomatic campaign. The goal was twofold: to provide high-

²⁴ MOL K429 Xerox/1. In his diary he emphasized that both Lajos Walkó (KÜM minister) and Kuno Klebelsberg "discovered" the radio. See notes for November 10, 1928, and November 11, 1928.

²⁵ MOL K429 Xerox/1. Kozma's diary entry on January 17, 1929.

²⁶ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. 16, 1927, 252–53 (November 23, 1928).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

quality, entertaining programming to Hungarians living in the neighboring countries and, simultaneously, to represent Hungary's cultural superiority and its contribution to European culture to foreign listeners. The government became a partner that supported these goals. This support was indeed necessary, because Hungarian radio faced challenges from home and abroad.

The breakthrough in Hungarian radio broadcasting came with the completion of the new 120-kilowatt Lakihegy station. The old station was barely a year old when the MTHR assembly started planning for a larger transmitter, pointing out that other European nations had launched a program to build bigger stations, at a maximum of 100 kilowatts, in accordance with International Radio Union standards. The members noted that Germany decided to build eight new 100-kilowatt stations, while an identical station was already under construction in Prague. They were especially worried about Czechoslovak plans to build more powerful stations in Košice (Kassa) and Bratislava (Pozsony) with "detrimental effects" on the reception quality of Hungarian broadcasts.²⁸ Kozma pointed out this argument in his letter to future prime minister Kálmán Darányi, expressing his concern that Budapest programming, which enjoyed a significant audience in the former Hungarian territory of Upper Hungary, might fall behind Prague.²⁹ The money for the new transmitter, an infrastructural investment, was to come from the government and produced a tug of war between the MTHR and the Postal Service. Ultimately the MTHR committed 4,500,000 pengő (out of the total cost of 6,500,000 pengő) to the construction.³⁰ Among the companies that bid were Marconi, Telefunken, Lorenz, Société Française Radiophonique, and the Radio Corporation of America. The project, which called for the construction of a new 120-kilowatt station and four relay stations, was given to the Hungarian Standard company and began in 1931.³¹

The 314-meter metal structure, the tallest in Europe, started operation on December 2, 1933, with a ceremonial live broadcast by

²⁸ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1930.*

²⁹ MOL K429, 51. csomó 1. tétel (April 4, 1929).

³⁰ Sugár, *Megszólal a rádió*, 98.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös. With the new tower, Hungarian radio and its four relay stations in Nyíregyháza, Miskolc, Pécs, and Magyaróvár became one of the most powerful and modern broadcasting operations in Europe, and the Lakihegy antenna remained its symbol until the first decade of the twenty-first century. The tower not only provided broadcasts with an unprecedented range, but it enabled programming changes. Budapest I broadcast from the new tower, and the new station, Budapest II, broadcast twenty-eight hours per week from the old twenty-kilowatt setting, while the new shortwave Budapest III, from Székesfehérvár, broadcast overseas.³² Further development and modernization of the studio system continued. The MTHR hired the best, most talented professionals. György Békésy, a communications engineer, designed the acoustics of Studio 6, built between 1932 and 1936 to house and broadcast live concerts.³³ By the mid-1930s, Hungarian radio was a significant factor in cultural diplomacy. A few weeks after the opening of the Lakihegy transmitter, Kozma openly acknowledged radio's role in Hungarian foreign policy:

In the world competition of nations, small nations [too] want to prevail; [however,] since they do not possess quantity of arms, they must all the more prevail through the quality of arms. This is especially true for everything that is Hungarian-related, because we are not only a small nation, but we are also a mutilated nation. Our culture is there not only as a guardian of our national existence but also as a weapon in achieving our future goals. In this arsenal one of the sharpest weapons is the radio.³⁴

³² *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1934 and 1935.*

³³ This studio is still in use. Békésy—better known in the West as Georg von Békésy—was awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology in 1961 for his research on mammal hearing.

³⁴ Miklós Kozma, "A legélesebb magyar fegyverek egyike a magyar rádió," *Cikkek, nyilatkozatok, 1921–1939* (Budapest: MTI Rt. Nyomda, 1939), 115. The article was first published in the magazine *Antenna* on December 24, 1933.

Radio: Cultural Diplomacy's Sharpest Weapon

The development of this "sharpest weapon" did not go unnoticed. Countries of the Little Entente and the international community recognized that the seemingly apolitical instrument of radio was a potent political apparatus. The international community realized the potential dangers of radio. M. L. Sourek, chairman of the board of the Broadcasting Association of Czechoslovakia, wrote: "no barriers can check the passage of Hertzian waves, which penetrate everything along their path."³⁵ In October 1927, approximately 600 delegates from sixty countries gathered in Washington, D.C., to regulate the development and operation of radio broadcasting.³⁶ After seven weeks of intense discussion, the conference agreed to 1) allocate frequency bands for international radio broadcasting; 2) regulate broadcasting that affected other countries; 3) set standard rates for radio telegrams; 4) recognize internationally fixed call signals for various countries; and 5) regulate the technical apparatus to prevent wave emission and interference between various national and international services.³⁷ In his closing speech, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover stated that the agreement was a "sign of the progressive capacity of the world to solve international problems" and a "fine tribute to the character and the spirit of the delegations."³⁸ To the small nations of East-Central Europe, including Hungary, radio presented a relatively affordable way to transmit their propaganda. This was not direct political propaganda, as there was no open criticism of neighboring countries or demands for territorial revision in the broadcasts. However, radio was not apolitical. Returning

³⁵ M. L. Sourek in International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, *Broadcasting and Peace: Studies and Projects in the Matter of International Agreements* (Paris: League of Nations, International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1933), 205.

³⁶ "International Radio," *Washington Post*, October 5, 1927, 6. The number of nations represented in Washington, D.C., is not clear. For example, the *New York Times* gave a figure of 79.

³⁷ "Agreements of International Conference Cover All Phases of Radio," *New York Times*, December 4, 1927, 20.

³⁸ "Radio Convention Signed at Parley," *New York Times*, November 26, 1927, 12.

from an international conference in Constantinople, where he argued for the need to keep radio broadcasting apolitical, Kozma typed two sentences in parentheses after the official summary of his trip: "I was not serious about this. Everything that we do is politics in any case, but at least we deny it."³⁹ His two-sentence notation essentially affirmed that in the post-World War I international climate, no cultural production was apolitical. On the contrary, broadcasting was designed to be an instrument of mass persuasion.

The KÜM was interested in the utility of radio broadcasting as a modern way of giving Hungary a voice abroad. It was especially active in carrying the voice of the nation to the English-speaking countries. For example, the Hungarian ambassador to the United States, Count László Széchényi—husband of American heiress Gladys Vanderbilt—gave a radio address on the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) on May 25, 1930. Using his extensive network of connections, he recruited Nicholas Longworth, speaker of the House of Representatives, to make introductory remarks. Longworth emphasized that Hungary "had been a nation for more than a thousand years—a people intensely proud of their nationality, highly cultured, exceedingly musical—they have produced Franz Liszt and no nation can ask for more glory than that—and with a national desire for liberty and self-government that has met the instant response and sympathy of the United States." Széchényi's own address touched on the question of war guilt and the "heroic struggle" of post-Trianon Hungary; then he drew historical connections between Hungary and America.⁴⁰

The KÜM was also instrumental in bringing the voice of Miklós Horthy to an American audience on May 1, 1932. A letter by César Saerchinger, CBS European service director, is evidence that the idea of a guest speaker for the first Hungarian broadcast in America came from the Hungarian Legation in London.⁴¹ Kozma personally intervened with Foreign Minister István Csáky to find the right "prominent figure." Kozma pointed out that other nations had already exploited this possibility. He noted the radio addresses of Tomáš Masaryk of Czechoslovakia, Wilhelm Miklas of Austria, and Heinrich Brüning

³⁹ MOL K429 Xerox/1 (May 29, 1929).

⁴⁰ MOL K66, 187. csomó (June 11, 1930).

⁴¹ MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (April 27, 1932).

of Germany. Kozma was not sure who should give the address, but he stressed the need for someone “whose name means something in America.” He pointed out that while he knew that the regent was not inclined to do “this sort of thing,” he would prefer if Horthy would change his attitude on special occasions.⁴² Why Horthy changed his mind is unclear, but despite his known dislike of modern technology, he agreed to give the radio address, which was well received in the United States.⁴³ The *New York Times*, under the headline “Regent of Hungary Heard Here on Radio,” reported on the event and quoted some of Horthy’s message, which praised George Washington on the 200th anniversary of his birth and President Hoover, while emphasizing friendly relations between the two nations.⁴⁴

The KÜM also paid attention to foreign broadcasters. For example, when Vernon Bartlett, BBC correspondent and former secretary of the League of Nations’ London branch, visited Budapest, the KÜM had advance notification of his impending visit. Accordingly, he was wined and dined, was introduced to the Hungarian political and cultural elite, and received the close attention of the government. As a result, reported *Pesti Hírlap*, five million BBC listeners learned about Hungary through Bartlett’s special broadcast. The newspaper quoted Bartlett as stating that “in a sensible world, if everyone would think sensibly, then the Hungarian borders would be amended.” It was something, as the paper noted, that Hungarian radio could not put forward so bluntly without charges of irredentism.⁴⁵ KÜM employees in every major country continued to seek opportunities to present Hungarian culture, history, and even politics to foreign listeners.

In August 1932, Hungarian cultural diplomacy gained yet another “weapon:” shortwave radio that allowed for a connection between

⁴² MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (April 12, 1932).

⁴³ Horthy spoke English well. There was, and is, a persistent rumor that Horthy learned English from James Joyce while the Irish author was in Pula (today in Croatia). Although the story made it into biographies of both men, there is no actual evidence that these language lessons ever took place.

⁴⁴ “Regent of Hungary Heard Here on Radio,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1932, 12.

⁴⁵ MOL K66, 202. csomó III-6 (October 12, 1932). Includes press clipping from *Pesti Hírlap*, December 16, 1932.

Hungary and the Americas.⁴⁶ From the beginning the MTHR sought to reach audiences beyond the country's physical borders and build an international style of programming. While Hungarian literature was well-represented in the programming—the great figures of Hungarian literature from Mihály Babits through Zsigmond Móricz to Dezső Kosztolányi all appeared in front of the microphone—Hungarian literature had one main disadvantage, namely that it was in Hungarian. If the broadcast wanted to reach non-Hungarian-speaking audiences, it had to speak to them in a language that was not as esoteric. The “speaker” (another term adopted from English, like “broadcast”) announced the programs in French, English, and Italian. In 1931 the radio began to broadcast news in four languages—French, English, Italian, and German—reinforced by a joint endeavor of the radio and the Magyar Külügyi Társaság (Hungarian Society for Foreign Affairs).⁴⁷ The relationship, not always without tension, produced a foreign-language lecture series that informed European listeners about various aspects of Hungarian culture and history. The growing recognition of Radio Budapest, and the variety it provided, was perhaps best illustrated in 1932, when Hungarian radio's guests included English novelist and playwright John Galsworthy, who received that year's Nobel Prize in Literature; British writer and pioneer of erotically charged romantic novels Elinor Glyn; German composer and conductor Richard Strauss; and French composer Maurice Ravel.⁴⁸ To elevate Radio Budapest's international profile, the MTHR organized programming exchanges with other nations. In 1931, the Budapest station received thirty-five foreign broadcasts, which included those of Pope Pius XI from Rome, the NBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Arturo Toscanini from New York, *Tristan and Isolde* from Bayreuth, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Richard Strauss, the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, and the Faraday memorial celebration from London. Conversely, the Budapest station sent twenty-six programs to 173 foreign stations.⁴⁹ From an institution that, just a decade

⁴⁶ “Az olimpiászra üzembehelyezték a székesfehérvári rövidhullámú adáslomást,” *Rádióélet*, August 7, 1932, 1251.

⁴⁷ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése*, 1932.

⁴⁸ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése*, 1933.

⁴⁹ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése*, 1932.

earlier, was housed in an old furniture-moving cart, Hungarian radio successfully transformed into the voice of the nation abroad. However, not everyone agreed with the programming choices, and Hungarian radio was under constant pressure from within and outside.

Domestic Challenges: The Hungarianness of Hungarian Radio

From the late 1920s, radio was a target of attacks questioning its Hungarianness. The criticism shows the complexity and uncertainty that surrounded the utilization of radio as a tool of cultural diplomacy, and more, as a place where the nation's very identity—in this case, its voice—was hotly debated. This dispute was not unlike the one about tourism, for it questioned the place and role of Hungary within the international community.

One of the main charges against the radio was precisely what made it successful as a tool of cultural diplomacy: its international character. Voices, mainly from rightist and vocal irredentist circles, argued that no language other than Hungarian should be used. *Rádióélet*, the MTHR's official weekly, responded to these charges frankly: "It benefits Hungary to introduce itself in these universal languages, because if it does not, it will only exclude itself." Furthermore, continued the editorial, "we must love ourselves, but the warm love of our nation will not make us the center of the universe."⁵⁰ An open attack came from Nándor Urmánczy in the Hungarian daily *Pesti Hírlap*. Urmánczy, one of the leading voices of open irredentism, charged the radio with "foreign worship" (*idegenimádat*) and stated that it was the "Hungarian soul" and the "Hungarian genius" that was not evident in Hungarian radio.⁵¹ In his reply Kozma rejected the charge that "Hungarian radio was everything but Hungarian." He argued that despite the charges made by Urmánczy, whom Kozma called the most prominent voice of "*gravaminális*" (irredentist politics laden with grievances and resentment), one of the main purposes of Hungarian radio was to showcase

⁵⁰ "A magyar rádió magyarsága," *Rádióélet*, March 27, 1931, 581.

⁵¹ "A magyar rádióról," *Pesti Hírlap*, February 21, 1931, 1.

Hungary and Hungarian culture abroad. Removing the international character of the broadcast, continued Kozma, would be counterintuitive, for cutting off Hungary from the cultural community of nations would actually harm the irredentist goal, the revision of Trianon.⁵² This is not to say that Kozma and company were not irredentist. On the contrary, Kozma was certainly a servant of the “Hungarian cause”—that is, the revision of Trianon—and saw radio as one of the best tools to manipulate international public opinion, but without “shouting it.” As the Hungarian ambassador in London, Iván Rubido-Zichy, put it, the high quality of programming served the Hungarian cause best and not the criticism and the “high-sounding hot-air patriotism of the chauvinists who think of Hungary as the center of the world” (“*hazafiságukat unalomig hangoztató magyar-glóbuszos sovíniszták*”).⁵³

Urmánczy and others pointed to an alleged foreign bias in radio programming, especially in music. This was quite a sensitive issue, since two-thirds of Hungarian broadcasting was music. The best solution for internationalizing the broadcast was music, which was not only a source of entertainment but a universal language that did not require translation. It was part of a larger European trend in which 66 percent of programming was music and 34 percent speech.⁵⁴ Urmánczy and his supporters, as a number of letters sent to the radio illustrate, demanded Hungarian music and Hungarian songs instead of foreign arias and symphonies. There were problems with this simple demand. First, as Kozma pointed out in his reply to Urmánczy, the Hungarian musical repertoire was not enough to fill the fourteen hours of daily programming.⁵⁵ When some argued against using music from abroad as part of the European concert series that included Prague, Warsaw, and Berlin, *Rádióélet* once again refuted these charges and pointed out that in 1930, radio played the works of 410 Hungarian composers/musicians, as opposed to those of 893 foreign composers. The ten most frequently aired Hungarian

⁵² MOL K429, 53. csomó 3. tétel, draft for “A magyar rádió: válasz Urmánczy Nándornak,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, February 24, 1931, n.p.

⁵³ Rubido-Zichy’s letter to Kozma, MOL K429, 53. csomó 3. tétel (February 26, 1931).

⁵⁴ “Idegen műsor-hazai műsor,” *Rádióélet*, October 3, 1930, 4.

⁵⁵ MOL K429, 53. csomó 3. tétel, draft for “A magyar rádió: válasz Urmánczy Nándornak,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, February 24, 1931, n.p.

composers, in descending order, were Ferenc Lehár, Ferenc (Franz) Liszt, Imre Kálmán, Jenő Hubay, Ferenc Erkel, Béla Bartók, Pongrác Kacsóh, Károly Goldmark, Ernő Dohnányi, and Zoltán Kodály. The ten most played foreign composers, in descending order, were Schubert, Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Beethoven, Puccini, Chopin, Johann Strauss II, Bach, and Brahms. “To those charging us with foreign bias,” insisted the editorial, “we ask if they could produce overnight the new Hungarian Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Johann Strauss, Wagner, Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Bizet, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Chopin?”⁵⁶ What was the quintessential Hungarian music that was to be the sound of the nation? Was it Hungarian folk music or the *magyar nóta*? And if it was the latter, asked some, what was Hungarian about music that was cultivated and performed by Gypsies?

As the tourism chapter illustrated, if the question of Hungarian-ness and the image of the Gypsy was a thorny question, the sound of the Gypsy was even more so. This was not a new problem. As Lynn M. Hooker shows in her excellent study, in the mid-nineteenth century, alongside the Austrian and German music that predominated in Central Europe, there was an upsurge in the popularity of a very different genre: “the Hungarian-Gypsy style” or *magyar nóta*.⁵⁷ The *magyar nóta* was the product of mid-nineteenth-century amateur musicians. These composers were mainly members of the Hungarian gentry, but as Hooker points out, they also included assimilated Germans and Gypsies.⁵⁸ The incredible success of this genre, both at home and abroad, presented cultural leaders with a complex dilemma. If music can articulate and represent the nation’s essence, can and should Gypsy music be the characteristic form of Hungarian-ness? Should Gypsies be entrusted with the soul of the Hungarian nation? asked Hungarian composer and musicologist Gábor Mátray as early as 1854.⁵⁹ The 1856 publication of Franz (Ferenc) Liszt’s *Des*

⁵⁶ “A magyar rádió magyarsága,” *Rádióélet*, March 27, 1931, 579–80.

⁵⁷ Lynn M. Hooker, *Redefining Hungarian Music from Liszt to Bartók* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

⁵⁸ Hooker, *Redefining Hungarian Music*, 39.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Hooker, *Redefining Hungarian Music*, 79. Gábor Mátray, “A magyar zene, és a magyar cigányok zenéje,” in *Magyarország és Erdély képekben*, vol. 4, ed. Ferenc Kubinyi and Imre Vahot (Pest: Emich, 1853), 118–28.

Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie upset the Hungarian intelligentsia, for Liszt portrayed Hungarian music as a creation of the Gypsies. The country's cultural elite, living under the post-1848 neo-absolutist system of Alexander Bach, rejected its most famous son. Hungarian literary giant Mór Jókai penned a scathing poem in which he accused Liszt of betraying the nation that gave him birth.⁶⁰ "In the aftermath of the publication of Liszt's book," argues Hooker, "it became almost impossible to write about the subject of Hungarian music, which was increasingly considered a 'problem,' without referring to the Gypsies and their role in it."⁶¹ From the 1860s and 1870s, musicologists and folklorists such as István Bartalus, Károly Színi, Áron Kiss, and Béla Vikár—motivated by Herder's writing on the role of national music—sought to find a more "authentic" sound of Hungarianness and began collecting folksongs (*népdal*) of the villages and small country towns. With the efforts of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, the first decade of the twentieth century saw the application of scientific methods to folk song collection.⁶²

In post-Trianon Hungary the debate about Hungarianness intensified the demand for an authentic sound different from that of cosmopolitan Budapest, something truly representative of the national culture. For Kodály and Bartók, this was the music of the peasantry. Bartók's oft-quoted 1931 essay "Cigányzene? Magyar zene?" ("Gypsy Music? Hungarian Music?") made it clear that he believed there was no such thing as Gypsy music but only "artificial folkloristic music"

⁶⁰ For the Hungarian reaction to Liszt's *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*, see Klára Hamburger, "Liszt cigánykönyvének magyarországi fogadtatása: első rész—1859–1861," *Muzsika* 43, no. 12 (December 2000), 20, http://www.muzeikalendarium.hu/muzsika/index.php?area=article&id_article=212&hl=hamburger (accessed September 9, 2014). For more about the role of Liszt in relation to the Hungarian-Gypsy style, see Shay Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), especially chap. 3, 86–118.

⁶¹ Hooker, *Redefining Hungarian Music*, 113. Hooker provides a table that illustrates that between 1844 and 1914, over 100 books and articles addressed the "problem of Hungarian music."

⁶² Tekla Dömötör, ed., *Magyar Néprajz, VI. Folklór 2.* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 6–7, <http://vmek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/06/4.html> (accessed September 18, 2014).

("népies műzene").⁶³ It is less often noted that Bartók's essay, originally a lecture to the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, responded to a German publication on Hungarian folk songs.⁶⁴ His goal was not to denounce Gypsies and Gypsy musicians.⁶⁵ He argued that Hungarian Gypsies provided mass entertainment to the urban and urbanizing public, in a genre that originated domestically, unlike foreign jazz and jingle-like songs (*kuplé*). He combated the mistaken and "rueful" (*gyászos*) foreign perception of Hungarian music in which the *népies műzene* or the *magyar nóta* was viewed as authentic Hungarian peasant music.⁶⁶ Zoltán Kodály was critical of Gypsy music's popularity, which he viewed as something that reflected the cultural "immaturity of the society" and, furthermore, its "diminishing

⁶³ Béla Bartók, "Cigányzene? Magyar zene?" in *Ethnographia: A Magyar Néprajzi Társaság értesítője* 42, no. 2 (1931), 49, http://www2.arcanum.hu/ethnographia/a100602.htm?v=pdf&a=pdfdata&id=1931_042&pg=0&l=hun (accessed September 18, 2014).

⁶⁴ See Heinrich Möller, ed., "Ungarische Volkslieder," in *Das Lied der Völker*, vol. 12 (Mainz: B. Schotts Söhne, 1929).

⁶⁵ Csongor Könczei, in his ethnographic study of the Gypsy musicians of the Hungarian villages, actually points out that Bartók differentiated between those Gypsy musicians playing in the villages and transmitting the authentic style of the peasants and those making their living in an urban setting. Csongor Könczei, "A magyar népzene kutatás falusi cigánymuzsikusa," *Korunk* (May 2009), <http://korunk.org/?q=node/10572> (accessed September 12, 2014).

⁶⁶ Bartók, "Cigányzene? Magyar zene?" 50.

The literature on Bartók and his complex relationship to modernity and nationalism is vast and certainly beyond the scope of my study. A partial list includes Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Judit Frigyesi, "Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and 'Volk' in Modern Hungary," *Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 255–87; David E. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary, and the Renewal of Tradition: Case Studies in the Intersection of Modernity and Nationality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); David Cooper, "Béla Bartók and the Question of Race Purity in Music," in *Musical Construction of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800–1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2001), 16–32; and the earlier-quoted Philip V. Bohlman's *The Music of European Nationalism*.

national consciousness.”⁶⁷ He argued that Hungarian culture, which always struggled between tradition and Western culture, needed to integrate folklore so that it became “high culture” and accept European cultural currents only as long as they contributed to this goal and could be organically incorporated. Only then, continued Kodály, could Hungarian culture be a bridge to connect Europe and Asia.⁶⁸ Others, like Eugene (Jenő) Ormándy, directly addressed foreign audiences. In the pages of the English-language *Hungarian Quarterly*, he argued passionately that modern Hungarian music had roots in the spirit of the Magyar peasant and had “nothing to do with the gypsy [*sic*] music which is so often mistaken as ‘typically Hungarian.’”⁶⁹

The radio, as the main transmitter of Hungarian music both at home and abroad, was frequently the target of criticism. The pages of *Rádióélet* were full of critical letters from listeners. Some admonished programmers for playing too much classical and Western music, while others scolded them for privileging Gypsy music.

One rather sarcastic editorial piece answered these charges and aptly depicts the problem of Hungarian music programming. The editorial, titled “The Hungarian Pride and the Radio,” told the story of an imaginary radio subscriber who wrote to the editor demanding that the radio only play *magyar nóta* and called for more Gypsies on the radio instead of all the other “useless stuff.” While abroad, as a proud Hungarian, he wanted to make propaganda for the country. He maneuvered the discussion to the topic of Hungary. Then came, from his foreign host, the “usual nonsense about wild horses, Gypsies, paprika, etc.” Our prideful Hungarian vehemently refuted such an image and argued that Hungary was a flawless, cultured state with modern cities and orderly villages and certainly not some sort of “Balkan” place. The foreigner pointed out that that Hungarian radio played nothing but Gypsy music, and thus the Hungarian could not reject the Gypsy image. The Hungarian explained that the music was actually Hungarian music played by Gypsies, but his host refused to relent. As a faithful fan of

⁶⁷ Zoltán Kodály, “Magyarság a zenében,” in *Mi a magyar?* ed. Gyula Szekfű (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1939), 412.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 416–17.

⁶⁹ Eugene Ormándy, “Modern Hungarian Music,” *Hungarian Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1937): 164–69.

the *magyar nóta*, the Hungarian argued that Hungarian music contributed a great deal to the world's music. The foreigner—revealed to be German—rejected all arguments about the worldwide importance of the *magyar nóta*, claiming that all nations have their folksongs and all think theirs are the most special. He then asked for names of great, world-famous Hungarian composers. Our *magyar nóta*-lover proudly displayed his knowledge by replying with the name of Ferenc Liszt. "He was German! He did not speak even a word of Hungarian!" was the answer. Our Hungarian was so upset that he almost reached for his knife, but as he listened to the arguments of his German host, he realized that he had made a similar argument against classical programming in his latest letter to the editor. Betraying his love for the *magyar nóta*, he riposted with the name of Ferenc Erkel, the composer of two important national operas: *Bánk bán* and *László Hunyadi*. "I never heard of him," replied the German. "But *Bánk bán* was even played on Radio Berlin," insisted the Hungarian. "That may be true," replied the German, "but who can remember all of these unknown pieces? I want world-renowned names!" Our Hungarian, motivated by pride, desperately retorted: "Bartók! Kodály! [Ernő] Dohnányi! [Jenő] Hubay! Do these names mean nothing to you?" "Ach so, recht schön! Das ist schon was!" ("I see, all right! That is better!"), nods the German. Our Hungarian, now warmed up, thought, "Who else do I hate in radio programming?" and continued by stating that the entire Hungarian race was full of talents such as Ferenc Lehár and Imre Kálmán and that it was only natural that Hungarian radio broadcast fifty or so operas a year, for the radio carries the culture. The story concluded with the Hungarian's realization that he might have to visit the opera one day.⁷⁰

The work of radio, argued Zoltán Kilián, the author of the editorial, should be important to all subscribers, for it was not enough "to brag about our cultural standards and pride ourselves on the greatness of our institutions and to indignantly reject the adjective 'Balkan.' In words we assert our great Western orientation and make our chest swell with pride, but we do not understand how easily our culture—just like a dilapidated building—could collapse."⁷¹ From its establishment,

⁷⁰ "A magyar büszkeség és a rádió," *Rádióélet*, April 22, 1932, 585.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 585–86.

Hungarian radio was more than a source of entertainment, continued Kilián, and this allowed Hungary to introduce itself on the radio waves to America and Europe. If the only purpose of the broadcast was entertainment, it lost its very reason for being.⁷²

Kozma often stated that radio and programming needed to adhere to national considerations, to showcase and project Hungarian culture beyond the physical borders. In his justification he used the same logic that underlay all Hungarian cultural diplomacy. As the first chapter illustrated, Hungarians argued that the West did not know or understand Hungary and that the price for being unknown had been paid at Trianon. Kozma believed that Hungarian radio significantly contributed to righting this wrong by providing a national voice, a voice that was “colorful, special, and unique, and one that illustrates that despite the country’s thousand years past, it remains young and vivacious.”⁷³ This voice was to show that the once-“rootless” (*rokontalan*) nation that found a new home far away from its origins, while having absorbed European culture, remained unique in its very soul, and it was this uniqueness that Hungary brought to Western culture, argued Kozma. To do this, he concluded, was not only the Hungarians’ right, but their duty and calling, for both Hungary and Europe benefited from this connection.⁷⁴

Ernő Dohnányi became the musical director of the radio to carry out Kozma’s vision. In 1931, programming included fifty-one operas from the Hungarian Opera House, three studio operas, eight operas on gramophone records, five studio operettas, twenty-eight classical concerts from the Hungarian Academy of Music, twenty-three concerts from the Vigadó concert hall, 183 philharmonic concerts, 163 opera concerts, 312 performances of popular or light music, 153 military band concerts, 138 performances of choir music, 257 gramophone concerts, the broadcasting of 470 Gypsy bands, sixty Hungarian folk-song nights with Gypsy bands, forty-four jazz bands, 1,331 prose broadcasts (including poems and literature and informational programs), 178 dramas, musicals, and cabarets, 136 religious programs,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Miklós Kozma, “A magyar rádió és az európai kultúra,” *Rádióélet*, June 25, 1933, 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

and 209 courses of various kinds, including language lessons.⁷⁵ Under Dohnányi, the MTHR and the government organized the Hungarian Ferenc Liszt Year (1935–1936). The stated goal was to emphasize the world-famous composer's Hungarian roots and promote the establishment of a "Liszt cult." Accordingly, between September 1935 and October 1936, programming included no less than 562 Liszt pieces. The Liszt European concert of September 10, 1936, was transmitted to fourteen European and eighty American stations.⁷⁶ To ensure the quality of Gypsy music, which remained one of the most popular genres both at home and abroad, the radio supervised the bands and their selections. This actually led to strife (known as the "Gypsy War") between radio and the Gypsy musicians. The relationship was mended, and in 1937 a two-hundred-member Gypsy band playing Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2" celebrated the Gypsies' five-hundred-year legacy in Hungary.⁷⁷ Hungarian radio became a popular spot for foreign musicians as well. In 1936, fifty-four foreign soloists and twenty-three conductors performed in the Budapest studio.⁷⁸ In the same year, Hungarian radio received eighty-five programs from abroad and provided sixty-two broadcasts from as far away as Japan.⁷⁹ The radio also continued its foreign-language programming in 1936, with 120 lectures in five languages.⁸⁰ The MTHR not only remained committed to its international style of programming but continued to widen its scope, not least because Hungarian radio continued to enjoy undivided government support. Thus *Rádióélet* was able to say that by 1937, Hungarian radio was one of the country's ablest diplomats.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1932.*

⁷⁶ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1937.*

⁷⁷ "Cigányok 500 éve Magyarországon," *Rádióélet*, April 30, 1937, 5. It should also be noted that according to the research conducted by Klára Szabó Kérészné, Gypsy music / *magyar nóta* remained by far the most popular musical genre. See Klára Szabó Kérészné [Mrs. Klára Szabó Kérész], "Rádiós közvéleménykutatások Magyarországon 1925–1945," in *Tanulmányok a Magyar Rádió történetéből 1925–1945*, ed. Tibor Frank (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont kiadása, 1975), 341–62.

⁷⁸ "A magyar rádió a diplomácia szolgálatában," *Rádióélet*, July 9, 1937, 11.

⁷⁹ *MTHR közgyűlési jelentése, 1937.*

⁸⁰ "A magyar rádió a diplomácia szolgálatában," *Rádióélet*, July 9, 1937, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

In September 1932, *Rádióélet* proudly reported that Radio Budapest was transmitting its first Jewish concert with a selection of ancient Hebrew songs, oratorios, and psalms.⁸² Few of those listening on September 20 to the hour-and-a-half concert could foresee the tragic turn the country was to take in five years. By 1938 the growing radical Right found another reason to attack the MTHR's programming. This time the government was unable and unwilling to mediate, for it was the government's legislation that legitimized questioning the "Jewishness" of the broadcast. The First Anti-Jewish Law (Act XV of 1938) restricted to 20 percent the ratio of Jews in liberal professions and in administration, commerce, and industry. The Second Anti-Jewish Law (Act IV of 1939) further restricted Jewish employment to 6 percent in liberal professions, limited Jewish employment in the media and theater, and reestablished the constraints of the 1920 *numerus clausus* in higher education. The reasons for the creation and acceptance of these laws are beyond the scope of my study, but it must be said that it was a result of organic, indigenous anti-Semitism and had nothing to do with supposed German pressure.⁸³

The MTHR and Kozma personally came under pressure to adhere to the spirit of these laws, which to many meant banning any radio programming originated or performed by Jews. This is not to say that Kozma had a problem with the spirit of the "Jewish Laws." He was most certainly an anti-Semite, albeit one motivated by economic concerns rather than racial beliefs.⁸⁴ A MTHR memorandum testifies that Kozma's media empire started removing Jews and "cleansing" radio programming before the First Anti-Jewish Law was enacted.⁸⁵ Never-

⁸² "A rádió első zsidó hangversenye," *Rádióélet*, September 16, 1932, 1547.

⁸³ The literature on this matter is immense. For examples, see works of László Karsai, Viktor Karády, and the latest work of Krisztián Ungváry.

⁸⁴ Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 516 and 531–32.

⁸⁵ Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 575. In the MOL K429 14. doboz (Xerox) file there is an undated and unsigned document that was most likely written by Kozma (to Teleki?). In the document the author twice mentions the fact that Hungarian radio started to "cleanse" the radio of Jewish influence. Based on the document, I can certainly ascertain that it was written after Kozma's letter to Béla Imrédy (January 31, 1939 / no signature). Zoltán Szász, in his 1975 study of the radio, quotes a document with similar text and cites it as "Kozma to Teleki." See Zoltán Szász, "A Magyar Rádió a második világháborúban (1939–1944)," in *Tanulmányok a Magyar Rádió*

theless, Kozma and radio were often attacked. Kozma even complained in his diary that “some even accuse me of being a friend of the Jews (*zsidóbarát*), because I am not eradicating them.”⁸⁶

Another MTHR memo to Prime Minister Béla Imrédy on January 31, 1939, after the First Anti-Jewish Law but before the Second Anti-Jewish Law, illustrates the complex relationship between radio and the “Jewish Question.”⁸⁷ The memo begins by stating that radio programming could not be separated from politics. Literary programming (poetry and prose) was easily amended to accord with the spirit of the “Jewish Laws,” states the document. Theater and dramatic-arts broadcasting posed more difficulty, but the most problematic was music programming. If one considered the Jewishness of the composer, the author or translator of the lyrics, and the performer, one had to face the fact that with sixteen-hour daily broadcasts, the non-Jewish Hungarian musical repertoire would last only two weeks, the memo states.⁸⁸

Because of the laws, some of the most popular and most patriotic songs and lyrics composed and/or written by Hungarian Jews became unwanted on the radio broadcast. The list of poets, composers, and lyricists is lengthy, but a few are specifically mentioned in both of the aforementioned memoranda. Ernő Szép’s 1914 poem “Imádság” (“Prayer”), in which the poet asks God to protect Hungary and save his homeland, is a heart-wrenching patriotic testimony. In 1939, when the Jewish community penned a pamphlet for the Hungarian public in which they asked Hungarians to “judge” them and their Hungarianness based on their contributions to Hungarian culture and history, they began with Szép’s poem.⁸⁹ Albert Szirmai, Imre Kálmán, and Viktor

történetéből 1925–1945, ed. Tibor Frank (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont kiadása, 1975), 174–75.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege: diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon* (Pécs and Budapest: Jelenkor és OSZK, 2013), 105.

⁸⁷ MOL K429 12. doboz (Xerox). While there is no signature on the document, I can say with conviction that such a letter would not be sent to the prime minister without the knowledge of Kozma. This is not to mention the very fact that the document is part of the Kozma Collection.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ In Márton Vida, ed., *Itéljete! Néhány kiragadott lap a magyar-zsidó életközösség könyvéből* (Budapest: Vida Márton, 1939), 3.

Jacobi were singlehandedly responsible for the domestic and international fame of Hungarian operettas. Their hits included *Mágnás Miska*, *Csárdáskirálynő*, and *Szibil*, operettas still performed today. Sándor Petőfi's *János Vitéz* was made into a hugely popular musical by Pongrác Kacsóh, but since the lyricist Jenő Heltai was Jewish, it could not be performed. The memoranda stated that under the law, even the likes of Márk Rózsavölgyi ("father of the *csárdás*") and Károly Goldmark (composer of the internationally famous opera *The Queen of Sheba*) had to be omitted from programming. By the time of the Anti-Jewish Laws, both were dead, just like Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, but they were still banned. The story of the song "Szép vagy, gyönyörű vagy, Magyarország" ("Hungary, You're Lovely, You're Beautiful") is important for several reasons. It was a song from the operetta *A hamburgi menyasszony* (The Bride from Hamburg), composed in 1920 by Zsigmond Vincze with lyrics by Ernő Kubinyi. Even the memorandum, far from friendly to the Jewish cause, referred to this song as one of the most beautiful, patriotic, and beloved Hungarian songs.⁹⁰ Vincze died in 1935. Ernő Kubinyi died on February 2, 1945, in an Austrian internment camp after being deported from Hungary.⁹¹

It is difficult to say to what degree the Anti-Jewish laws impacted the broadcasting. After 1939, radio broadcast less music. The *Rádióélet* programming guide suggests that Gypsy music and the *magyar nóta* remained the most popular in both domestic and foreign broadcasts. While the programming notes become less descriptive, identifying most pieces only as "operettas" without noting the title and composer, Rózsavölgyi and Kálmán can still be found among the composers. Perhaps the memorandum was right in stating that "today radio is held responsible for everything, but radio cannot give anything else than the substance of the national culture. [And] Sadly, it is not possible to wipe clean the culture."⁹² Indeed, Hungarian radio could not afford to have

⁹⁰ MOL K429 14. doboz (Xerox) and MOL K429 12. doboz (Xerox).

⁹¹ The Hungarian "national rock" band Kárpátia covered the song in 2004. I wonder how many of the band's ultra-right fans, including those from the Jobbik party and the Magyar Gárda, actually know that they are singing along with a song that was originally composed and written by two Hungarian Jews.

⁹² MOL K429 14. doboz (Xerox).

inferior programming; thus it could not eradicate Gypsies and Jews from programming even if it wanted to, for without them there was no such thing as Hungarian culture.

Challenges to the Radio's Foreign Policy: From "the Battle of Radio Armaments" to War

From the beginning, the MTHR sought to maintain programming independence. This does not mean that radio was apolitical. On the contrary, as noted earlier, Kozma believed that everything that radio did was political. Nevertheless, the MTHR set up a guideline under which no openly irredentist programming would make it on the air. And there were many who sought access to this most powerful instrument of public persuasion: authors of irredentist children's tales, those demanding more militaristic programming, and others who wanted to hear religious sermons with openly political messages.⁹³ Mária Ormos's study illustrates that Kozma signaled his interest in propaganda as early as 1920 and began his journey toward becoming one of the leading architects of Hungary's cultural-diplomatic campaign.⁹⁴ However, he did not believe that open, inflammatory propaganda worked.⁹⁵ Teleki agreed, and perhaps that was one of the reasons why Kozma was named director of MTI in the first place. By the late 1920s, he had all the tools to carry out his mission, a mission not without challenges.

In his aptly titled article "The Battle of Radio Armaments," American publicist and propaganda strategist Heber Blankenhorn argued that broadcasting was closely linked to international tensions, and he blamed nationalist attitudes in broadcasting for many contemporary problems. The radio race for larger audiences, with bigger and better transmitters, was responsible for the "high-power broadcasting armament," which he compared to a naval arms race that sought to develop the largest caliber of battery guns. While the United States upheld the legal limitations of 50-kilowatt stations, others did not. "Little Hungary

⁹³ MOL K429, 51. csomó 1. tétel; MOL K429, 58. csomó 1. tétel; MOL K429 14. doboz (Xerox).

⁹⁴ Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 71–72.

⁹⁵ MOL K429 14. doboz (Xerox).

is to have one of 120 kilowatts, Prague 120, Vienna likewise.” He continued: “Poland’s new station, supposed to be 120, has just started up at 156. Berlin and Paris are going up; and so are the Russians. The Russians, as part of the Five-Year Plan, are thinking of spending \$45,000,000 for a station of 500 kilowatts and a short-wave transmitter to reach anywhere.”⁹⁶ Blankenhorn voiced his disapproval over a development that turned radio from an instrument of cooperation to a weapon of war:

“Free” radio means an easy and constant interchange of thought between one country and another. Free trade in radio broadcasting may well prove a source of international understanding and good will. But the trend is not in that direction. Threats and fears, hostile radio barriers and controversies promise little to human kind. “Science,” which was made for peace, devised the horrors, the gas, and liquid fire of the last war. The throttling of radio may bring about a result quite as hideous.⁹⁷

The *Washington Post* did not mince words either in an editorial titled “Unseen World War Is Fought; Nations Fill Ether with Words.” While the author did not use the term “cultural diplomacy,” it is clear that he understood the basic rationale behind the competition for listeners:

A new world war is being fought today with an old, old weapon—words. Nations all over the globe hurl verbs, nouns, and adjectives across the sky day after day, night after night, in an endless battle which no one sees, a battle of which man never before has experienced. It is war by radio. . . . It is war, but diplomatic war. The broadcasts placate rather than threaten. Their battle is for friends. They try to get their particular nation’s attitude across to the people of other nations. They build their national, social, political, and economic viewpoints into programs in such a way that they will not be consciously noticed but will still be unconsciously felt. . . . Warfare in this ethereal realm may take

⁹⁶ Heber Blankenhorn, “The Battle of Radio Armaments,” *Harper’s Magazine* 164, no. 979 (December 1931): 83–88.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

strange forms. Sympathy may be transmitted in music. . . . War—or peace—teams cannot be formed without sympathetic ties between peoples.⁹⁸

Although the editorial concluded that radio could be a tool of peace, for people sympathetic to one another would not go to war, this was not a sentiment shared by Hungary's neighbors.

Little Entente countries were keenly aware that the Budapest station reached ethnic Hungarians within their borders. A 1931 letter to the MTHR from István Munka, a Hungarian teacher living in southern Czechoslovakia, was representative of the growing tension. In the letter he stated that he was among the first in his small village to possess a radio and that since 1927, he had been a faithful listener of Radio Budapest. The set often ended up on the front porch so others, mainly fellow Hungarians, could enjoy the broadcast. According to Munka, in December 1930 he received a citation for disturbing the peace. The citation claimed he was listening to the Hungarian national anthem, even though he insisted that on the day in question, this was not broadcast.⁹⁹ As a first step, the Little Entente countries turned to the League of Nations International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation with charges of Hungarian *propagande inadmissible*. According to the correspondence of Frigyes Wünscher, acting director of MTI, with Ferenc Mengele, head of the press department at the KÜM, the International Radio Union's meeting featured a heated debate, where Kozma disputed not only the charges against Hungarian radio but the role of the Union vis-à-vis the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. The letter emphasized that the Little Entente's action should be monitored but that for now this should not be made public.¹⁰⁰ Predictably, three days later the *Budapesti Hírlap's* headline stated: "Little Entente Wants to Silence Hungarian Radio."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ "Unseen World War Is Fought; Nations Fill Ether with Words," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1937, B5.

⁹⁹ MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (March 7, 1931).

¹⁰⁰ MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (May 18, 1933).

¹⁰¹ This piece is from the Hungarian Radio Archives' article press clipping collection. As such, the page numbers are often not visible. Below I cite these articles in the following way: "MRA, 'Article Title,' *Newspaper Source*, date."

According to the editorial, the Little Entente employed three different tactics. First, in the pages of the national and international press, it accused Hungarian radio of broadcasting propaganda endangering the peace and agitating minorities. Second, the respective nations introduced laws controlling the radio audience. And finally, the third phase was to bring these charges to the international community, making it into a "European issue."¹⁰²

The neighboring countries' growing criticism of the Hungarian broadcast served to reassure Kozma and company that the radio was achieving its goals. Both the technical quality and the entertainment value of Hungarian radio programming were superior to its neighbors. Even the relay stations were set up in a strategic way to enable Hungarian broadcasts to carry far beyond the borders.¹⁰³ It was something that even the contemporary Czechoslovak *Kultura* magazine (from Trnava [Nagyszombat] in today's Slovakia) acknowledged. The magazine argued that the most significant problem was the Bratislava broadcasts' poor technical quality and meager programming. It pointed out that in the Slovak region, everyone, including ethnic Slovaks, preferred to listen to Radio Budapest.¹⁰⁴ The article argued that this was due to the fact that Prague did not supply enough Slovak cultural programming. By contrast, Hungarian radio, keenly aware of the tension between Prague and the proponents of a more independent Slovak culture, offered Slovak radio nights.¹⁰⁵ A newspaper in Subotica (Szabadka) in Yugoslavia's Vojvodina region, which had a large Hungarian population, made similar comments. According to this source, as reported in the Hungarian newspapers, because of the poor technical quality and low programming standards of its competitors, everybody in the region listened to Hungarian radio, which through its relay stations provided clear and entertaining broadcasts. The newspaper *Sub-*

¹⁰² MRA, "A kisantant el akarja némítani a magyar rádiót," *Budapesti Hírlap*, May 21, 1933.

¹⁰³ As Kozma stated, in the construction and deployment of relay stations, only foreign policy goals mattered. MOL K429, 51. csomó 1. tétel (May 15, 1929).

¹⁰⁴ "A szlovenszkoj rádió és Budapest," memo in MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (June 26, 1934).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

otica demanded the construction of a Belgrade station of more than 200 kilowatts and in the meantime asked for the seizure of crystal radio receivers.¹⁰⁶ Representing the Hungarian attitude, András Hóry, permanent deputy minister in the KÜM from 1934–1935, thanked Kozma, stating that the “recognition coming from the enemy pages” was the best testimony to the patriotic and quality work of the radio.¹⁰⁷

While quality programming remained radio’s best asset in a competitive broadcasting field, Hungarian radio did not shy away from direct political confrontation. On October 9, 1934, a lone gunman assassinated King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and French foreign minister Louis Barthou in Marseilles. While the assassin was a Bulgarian national (of Macedonian ethnicity, to further complicate the story), he had close connections with the Croatian Ustaša movement, a separatist, ultra-national fascist group. The Ustaša, in turn, had close ties with Hungary and Italy. Following the assassination, Yugoslavia, supported by Romania and Czechoslovakia, accused the Hungarian government of responsibility for the assassination. The case went to the League of Nations, and the MTHR worked tirelessly to represent the Hungarian point of view. In the meantime, the Yugoslav government expelled thousands of ethnic Hungarians. The situation came perilously close to an armed conflict between the two countries, and the radio reported the events, emphasizing Hungary’s innocence.¹⁰⁸ As a result of the foreign radio coverage of the aftermath of Marseilles, the KÜM launched its radio-listening division.¹⁰⁹

The “radio war” between Hungary and members of the Little Entente intensified. The Hungarian press reported that in April 1933, the Czechoslovak government had begun censoring radio broadcasting, a move that potentially endangered “the democratic values of the republic.”¹¹⁰ Czechoslovak radio also temporarily discontinued

¹⁰⁶ MRA, “Szerb támadás a magyar rádió ellen,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, June 20, 1933.

¹⁰⁷ MOL K66, 238. csomó III-6/1 (July 7, 1934).

¹⁰⁸ For more on the assassination and its aftermath, see Mária Ormos, *Merényilet Marseille-ben* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1984).

¹⁰⁹ MOL K 429, 56. csomó 5. tétel (January 1935).

¹¹⁰ MRA, “A csehszlovák kormány a külföldi rádió propagandája ellen,” *Újság*, April 21, 1933.

its Hungarian-language programs. According to contemporary Hungarian reports, in Uzhgorod (Ungvár), Czechoslovak authorities made listening to Hungarian radio in public a punishable offense.¹¹¹ The MTHR decided that it needed the aid of a professional diplomat. In January 1935, Jenő Nelky, former chief of the KÜM's press department, ambassador in Vienna, and consul in Argentina and the United States, became the head of the radio's foreign division and the permanent representative of Hungary at the International Radio Union.¹¹² The Hungarian-Czechoslovak radio war made it onto the pages of the publications *American Current History* and *Foreign Affairs*. In the former, Czechoslovak censorship was mentioned as a reaction to Hungarian agitation. Since there are "no frontiers in the air," Belgrade built a powerful new transmitter, which, according to the official statement, was to "penetrate everywhere where southern Slavs live and drown out Hungarian revisionist propaganda."¹¹³

César Saerchinger was more critical of Czechoslovakia. He stated, "Czechoslovakia is the only democratic country using 'authoritarian' methods for the consolidation of its regime. Its excuse for the curtailment of freedom on the air is that in view of the country's precarious strategic position the end justifies the means."¹¹⁴ However, Searchinger could not have known that Hungarian radio was deployed to carry out a covert mission. Kozma's diary testifies that on September 20, 1938, the MTHR embarked on a secret broadcasting campaign that carried anti-Czech propaganda and agitated for the rise of Slovak and Rusyn national sentiment. The "*Szlovák bujdosó*" ("Hiding Slovak") and the "*Ruszin függetlenségi komité*" ("Rusyn Independence Committee") broadcast from Nyíregyháza, Magyaróvár, and Salgótarján.¹¹⁵ In the pages of his diary, Kozma proudly discussed all details of the clandestine activity, which included hiring (Hungarian) announcers

¹¹¹ MRA, "Magyarellenes rádiórendelet Ungváron," *Pesti Napló*, December 30, 1934.

¹¹² MRA, "Nelky Jenő a rádió külföldi osztályának vezetője," *Pesti Napló*, January 5, 1935.

¹¹³ Frank C. Hanighen, "Propaganda on the Air: The International Problem of Radio Censorship," *Current History* 44, no. 3 (1936): 48–49.

¹¹⁴ Saerchinger, "Radio as a Political Instrument," 249.

¹¹⁵ MOL K429, 12. doboz. Kozma's diary (September 24, 1938).

who could speak Ukrainian and Slovakian, while making sure that the Hungarian-language broadcast included grammar and stylistic mistakes common to Slovak and Ukrainian speakers of Hungarian.¹¹⁶ A few months later, after the First Vienna Award, Hungary received part of its lost territories from the now-defunct Czechoslovakia. As Hungarian troops marched into Košice (Kassa), so did the employees of Hungarian radio. Soon enough, MTHR employees were seeking to start broadcasting from Transylvania. Film professionals were in both places with the MTHR employees to provide a visual representation for the nation.

The Birth, Destruction, and Rebirth of the Hungarian Movie Industry, 1896–1929

Interwar Hungarian political elites also sought to utilize cinematic production to inform and enlighten foreign audiences. It was a significant challenge, for the image of Hungary was rather negative and, as the previous chapter illustrated, often based on stereotypes connected with *pushta* romanticism. One of the film industry's aims was to alter the image of Hungary as backward, semi-feudal, and generally anachronistic. Instead, it aspired to find a balance whereby Hungarian traditions and history—in its most positive light—could be presented next to, but obviously not necessarily at the same time as, the image of Hungary as a modern, progressive, and European country. Having a modern cinema industry was essential in these efforts. However, the development of Hungarian cinematic production was not as straightforward as that of radio.

In 1921 a story appeared on the front page of the Hungarian weekly *A Mozi* (The Cinema) entitled “My Excursion to 1938 and Back. My Guide: H. G. Wells.” The storyteller took a trip to the future with the help of Wells's time machine and visited Hűvösvölgy, in the Second District of Budapest, which by then had become home to a giant Hungarian film studio. In his imaginary voyage, the narrator had coffee with the leading figures of the European film industry—Olaf

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Fønss, Fritz Lang, Conrad Veidt, and Robert Reinert—all of whom were working in Budapest. Paul Wegener—director of the film *The Golem*—was putting the finishing touches on his tenth movie, made in Budapest.¹¹⁷ Another director complained that the Budapest studios could produce only 800–1,000 films a month, which was not enough, given that in America alone, the demand for Hungarian movies ran to 300 movies per month. The last stop was Budapest's Margaret Island. Both Wells and the narrator saw a large English sign on the giant glass dome that covered the entire island. It read: "World." Descending through the opening of the dome, they landed in a medieval German town, witnessed the Grand Canal of Venice, and saw city scenes from Constantinople, Moscow, and Amsterdam. There were hundreds of structures in this strangely invigorating place, which as they learned, was known as Film City (*Filmváros*).¹¹⁸

The author's imaginary journey illustrates the hopes and aspirations of the Hungarian film elite. Yet in 1921, these hopes and aspirations were as fantastic as the idea of time travel, for at the time, the Hungarian movie industry was in utter shambles. This had not always been the case. Moving pictures arrived in Budapest in 1896, during the millennial celebrations. Soon afterward, the city's vibrant coffee-houses became makeshift movie theaters, none more famous than the Velence (Venice), where the history of Hungarian cinema began, with the headwaiter (József Bécsi) doubling as projectionist.¹¹⁹ This new mode of entertainment was incredibly popular, and the number of

¹¹⁷ Olaf Fønss (1882–1949) was a Danish-born actor and director and star of the 1913 film *Atlantis*. Fritz Lang (1890–1976) was the director, among other films, of the silent classic *Metropolis*. Conrad Veidt (1893–1943) was a German actor, well-known for his role in the 1919 classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Cagliari*. Robert Reinert (1872–1928) was a German film director and novelist. Paul Wegener (1874–1948) was an actor, writer, and director who played a pivotal role in the development of German expressionist film.

¹¹⁸ Ferenc Szántó, "Kirándulásom 1938-ba és vissza. Vezető: H. G. Wells," *A Mozi* 6, no. 9 (February 1921): 1–2.

¹¹⁹ John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 5–7. On the history of Hungarian silent films, see Zsolt Kőhádi, *Tovamozduló ember tovamozduló világban—A magyar némafilm 1896–1931 között* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1996).

cinemas grew at an amazing pace.¹²⁰ The celebrated Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy declared that “the moving picture is the most wonderful creation of human ingenuity.”¹²¹ By 1912, there were 270 permanent movie theaters in Hungary;¹²² two years later, there were 108 cinemas in Budapest alone.¹²³ The first Hungarian film studio, Hunnia, was built in 1911–1912.¹²⁴ The first Hungarian moving picture, *A tánc* (The Dance), appeared in 1901; it depicted various dance forms. Two of the first Hungarian narrative films, or dramatic art films, were the 1912 *Nővérek* (Sisters) and *Ma és holnap* (Today and Tomorrow).¹²⁵ By the end of World War I, there were over two dozen film studios in operation, and between 1914 and 1918, they released well over 250 pictures.¹²⁶ During this era Mihály Kertész, later known as Michael Curtiz, famed director of the 1942 classic *Casablanca*; Sándor Korda, later known as Alexander Korda, director and producer, and one of the founding fathers of the British film industry; his two youngest brothers, Zoltán and Vincent; and Béla Blaskó, better known as Béla Lugosi of *Dracula* fame, began their careers.

The short-lived Bolshevik government of 1919 was one of the first postwar Eastern European regimes to utilize cinema for political purposes. György Lukács, commissar of culture and education, paid special attention to the movie industry, which, Nemeskürty claims,

¹²⁰ John Lukacs dates the opening of the first “real cinema” to 1899, while according to David Frey, it was in 1906. See Lukacs, *Budapest 1900*, 178; and David S. Frey, “National Cinema, World Stage: A History of Hungary’s Sound Film Industry, 1919–1944” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003), 25.

¹²¹ Frigyes Karinthy, “A mozgófénykép metafizikája,” *Nyugat* 12 (1909), http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/index_abc_sz.htm (accessed September 18, 2011).

¹²² István Nemeskürty, *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema*, trans. Zsuzsanna Horn and Fred Macnicol (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), 13.

¹²³ Frey, *National Cinema*, 25.

¹²⁴ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 14. The studio was forced to close down a year later, but the name was eventually restored.

¹²⁵ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 8–10.

¹²⁶ Frey, *National Cinema*, 26. According to Nemeskürty, thirty-two film studios were established between 1908 and 1919.

almost uniformly supported the Bolshevik regime, though not primarily for ideological reasons. The main reason for the support was economic interest, because under the previous system most power rested with the film distributors and cinema owners, not with filmmakers.¹²⁷ Hungary nationalized its film production (the first country ever to do so) and put it under the control of a Commissars' Council and two other government organizations. Béla Paulik, László Márkus, and Sándor Korda produced thirty-three feature films between themselves. Mihály Kertész directed the movie *Jön az öcsém* (My Brother Is Coming), one of the first agitprop films, if not the first.¹²⁸ More importantly, the Hungarian Bolsheviks produced twenty newsreels, entitled *Vörös Riport* (Red Report), each about five minutes in length.¹²⁹

In August 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic fell. Miklós Horthy's counter-revolutionary forces unleashed the most violent retribution. The White Terror targeted left-wing intellectuals and politicians, as well as Jews. Sándor Korda, Mihály Kertész, Béla Lugosi, Béla Balázs, and György Lukács were only a few of the many artists and intellectuals forced to leave Hungary. The new Horthy regime distrusted film and severely restricted film production and distribution. Most of the films made under the Kun regime, features and newsreels alike, were destroyed. Cinema operators, mainly Jews, did not fare much better. According to contemporary police reports, as result of the enforcement of Order 8454/1920 M. E., 75 percent of cinema owners were forced to sell, for they did not receive new permits.¹³⁰ The report added that this did not achieve the desired results. Most of the new owners were completely lacking in know-how and capital and hence not able to operate the cinemas proficiently. Many of them failed. By 1921 only eighty-three movie theaters were in operation.¹³¹

Industry professionals and leading intellectuals took stock of the state of the Hungarian film industry and emigrated. Others tried to

¹²⁷ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 42.

¹²⁸ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁰ Police report published in "Budapesti mozgóképszínházak, 1903–1923," *Filmspirál* 25 (2001), <http://www.filmintezet.hu/magyar/filmint/filmspir/25/mozik.htm> (accessed September 19, 2011).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

find solace in envisioning a better future through a time machine. Still others attempted to convince the government to reform the regulations surrounding movie production and distribution. László Márkus, later director of the National Opera, argued that Hungarian films should be used in the country's propaganda abroad: "We must use everything that can induce the conscience of the world [to revise the Trianon Treaty], and film, being an art form that echoes through the souls of the masses, is the most suitable above all others." What sort of films should Hungarians make? Márkus argued for an entirely Hungarian product that represented the national culture and would illustrate the country's "cultural superiority," which in his mind was the only "incontestable" and "irresistible" argument in support of Hungarian justice. Therefore, he continued, Hungarian films should not make "awkward" pictures where the harbor of Újpest doubles for the sea, the old district of Buda for Paris, and Váci Street for New York. Instead, these films should tell the stories of Hungarian scholars, artists, and other figures set in Budapest, in the Hortobágy, or at Lake Balaton.¹³² Even more to the point was film director Pál Fejős's 1922 open letter to the minister of interior, in which he pleaded for a reconsideration of the regulations requiring a special daily permit for filming in Budapest. This permit was not only expensive but also demanded a number of bureaucratic steps, such as a certificate of good moral standing (*erkölcsi bizonyítvány*) to prove that one was politically and socially reliable. He asked the minister to imagine himself for a moment as a film director. Would he want to deal with all these procedures? Would he want to ask leading actresses to provide evidence of their birthdates? He argued that the regulations made it impossible to make movies in Hungary:

Your Excellency! In the name of the once-so-promising Hungarian film industry and film art, I ask Your Excellency to remedy this terrible situation before all the embittered Hungarian directors, actors, and cameramen leave for abroad, where the state aids film production, and one is not obliged to complete an

¹³² Márkus László, "Milyen filmet adjunk a külföldnek," *Filmművészeti Évkönyv*, ed. Andor Lajta (1922), 115–16.

obstacle course before each shooting. Help us, Your Excellency!
There are already too many of us in emigration!¹³³

His plea apparently fell on deaf ears. In 1924 Fejős too left Hungary. The once-promising Hungarian film industry was nearly destroyed. There were no seasoned directors and no investment capital. Elsewhere, in the meantime, cinema was fast becoming a profitable industry and a significant factor not only in entertainment but also in politics.

By the mid-1920s the new regime consolidated its power. With the domestic situation secured, the government reassessed its relationship to the movie industry. To raise much-needed capital, in 1923 the Ministry of Interior, with Decree 6900/1923 B. M., allowed the return of the displaced Jewish cinema operators by making partnership arrangements lawful.¹³⁴ Diplomats suggested that Hungary needed to make use of the cinema's ability to inform and propagandize. The New York consulate requested pictures and films that would depict Hungarian folklore, fishing and hunting, and industry and commerce, as well as parades and festivals. The consul emphasized that the requested material should be free of propaganda overtones and "accompanying tales."¹³⁵ The Hungarian consul in Munich argued that the "movie as an educational and cultural tool is indispensable" and "it alone will be the illustrative source material in the future." As an example, the consul offered the model of German *Kulturfilme*.¹³⁶ The poor state of the domestic film industry was also a topic of parliamentary debates. József Pakots, one-time screenwriter and Social Democratic member of Parliament, argued that the once-promising movie industry was in ruins because official circles failed to appreciate the "internationally great interest" in film production. Now, he continued, as the government struggled to find ways to portray the achievements of Hun-

¹³³ The open letter was originally published in the magazine *Mozihét* (September 1922). Reproduced in *Filmspirál* 33 (2004), http://www.filmintezet.hu/uj/kiadvanyok/filmspiral/33/a_rendorseg.htm (accessed September 19, 2011).

¹³⁴ Frey, *National Cinema*, 43.

¹³⁵ MOL K67, 2. csomó, 1. tétel (New York Consulate, August 18, 1922).

¹³⁶ MOL K67, 5. csomó, 1. tétel (Munich, October 22, 1924).

garian culture abroad and to publicize the negative economic and social impact of the Trianon Treaty, Hungary had to follow other nations' examples and support film production. Pakots emphasized that the question of the domestic film industry was not only an economic but also a cultural, social, and propaganda issue.¹³⁷

One of the people who listened was Miklós Kozma, whom Prime Minister Bethlen appointed in 1922 to invigorate the work of MTI. Kozma was politically the right choice—a former military officer and supporter of the counter-revolution. He was also a committed supporter of the White International, an aborted attempt to bring together a German-Austrian-Hungarian-Russian anti-Bolshevik alliance, which, according to historian Mária Ormos, illustrates that early on, Kozma was a “foreign policy illiterate.”¹³⁸ Even if one accepts Ormos's judgment of Kozma's foreign policy abilities, he was unquestionably among the first to realize that the country needed to remodel its news and information service. With the moral and financial support of the KÜM, the East News Reel Agency was created, which served as the first attempt to produce Hungarian-made newsreels for foreign audiences.¹³⁹

In the next few years, three major events signaled the growing interest of government circles. In 1924 the MFI was established with Miklós Kozma and Zoltán Taubinger (who later, as part of the trend toward adopting more-Hungarian-sounding names, changed his surname to Tőrey) at the helm. The business model for the new company was provided by the Italian LUCE. Kozma traveled to Italy to study film production and, upon his return, wrote a fifty-eight-page report. Even more telling was a private letter to András Hóry, Hungarian ambassador in Rome, in which he told his friend that he had also prepared a confidential “aide-memoire” to the Cabinet, in which

¹³⁷ *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, vol. 35 (1922): 103 (October 21, 1925).

¹³⁸ Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 74.

¹³⁹ On this agency I could not find further documentation. My only source is the manuscript of Tibor Megyer (Meyer), who was one of the first news camera operators in Hungary. Tibor Megyer, “A magyar filmhíradó és annak fejlődése egy operatőr szemszögéből és saját élményei alapján, 1923–1961” (manuscript, available at the Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum [Hungarian National Film Archives—MNFA], 1975), 1. I thank Márton Kurucz for making this source available to me.

he suggested that the reorganization of the country's film industry should be based on the Italian model. He also told his friend that the new film law would be based on his recommendations but that this information was too sensitive and could not be leaked to the press under any circumstances.¹⁴⁰ The new company's main profile, similar to LUCE, was propaganda, documentary, and newsreel production, and it enjoyed the financial support of the KÜM. The new company received 60,000 pengő (out of a total investment of 150,000 pengő) from the KÜM.¹⁴¹ The government became not only a major shareholder in the new company but also its best customer. Shortly after its establishment, the MFI took over newsreel production and produced the *Magyar Híradó* (Hungarian News).

Prime Minister István Bethlen's Decree 6292/1925 established the Filmipari Alap (Film Industry Fund) to support and regulate film production and distribution. The board of directors included representatives of the KÜM, the VKM, and the Ministry of Interior. To finance home-grown film production and the operation of the Film Industry Fund, the government levied a new tax on movies based on their length. Hungarian-made movies received differential treatment and were often entirely exempted from the tax.¹⁴²

The third episode on the road to recovery was the creation of Hunnia Film in 1928. One of Hungary's largest film studios, Corvin, went bankrupt in 1925. The Film Industry Fund bought the studio and modernized it. The goal of the 810,000-pengő investment was to resurrect domestic film production. While nominally independent, the new company was very much under government control. János Bingert, a former police captain and employee of the Ministry of Interior, became the director of Hunnia.¹⁴³ Hunnia was also the largest beneficiary of the Film Industry Fund for years to come. The mandate of Hunnia was clear. In accordance with the unofficial division of labor, while the MFI was responsible for the production of *Kulturfilme*, doc-

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in István Molnár, "Film és államhatalom Magyarországon, 1900–1945," manuscript (1972), 87–88. Available at the MNFA Library, Ref. Ké 213/1.

¹⁴¹ Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 103.

¹⁴² Frey, *National Cinema*, 45–46.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46.

umentaries, and newsreels, Hunnia was to produce Hungarian-made feature films.

While the government attained a degree of control over the film industry, it did not coordinate and control its activities in same way that the Soviets, and later the Nazis, did.¹⁴⁴ The timing of growing government interest, however, was not accidental. Just like academia and tourism, the film industry benefited from the fact that by 1927, Hungary had broken out of its postwar isolation. Because of the Bethlen administration's more active foreign policy seeking support for the revision of the treaty, the country's foreign image became important. The film, which provided "an unrivalled method of propaganda," to quote British writer W. Somerset Maugham, was not to be left out from the arsenal of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.¹⁴⁵

Celluloid Résumés: The Role of Kulturfilme and Newsreels

A confidential memorandum written by Zoltán Gerevich, a KÜM ministerial advisor, called upon all Foreign Ministry outposts to pay special attention to those foreign movies that were "so-called Hungarian or Hungarian-related films." He referred to some movies that included Hungarian-related elements such as raffish Hungarian hussars, which painted a negative picture of Hungary. To avoid these sorts of cinematic representations, which, according to Gerevich, "were not only hurtful, but downright offensive," all KÜM employees were to use both official and unofficial avenues to remedy the situation.¹⁴⁶

Changing the "offensive" image of Hungary abroad required new tools. Censorship, of course, only worked in the domestic market. To

¹⁴⁴ On the government role in Nazi and Soviet cinematic production, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001); and Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁴⁵ W. Somerset Maugham, "On Writings for the Films," *North American Review* 213, no. 786 (May 1921): 670.

¹⁴⁶ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (May 5, 1930).

counter negative film images the government had to find a film genre which could neutralize harmful characterizations, but do this without being too propagandistic. The choices were *Kulturfilme* and newsreels. The former was developed by the German UFA (Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft) in the mid-1920s to illustrate the achievements of past and present German culture and life.¹⁴⁷ The question of what the national image should look like on the screen divided Hungary's cultural, film, and political elite.

When cinema began, most people believed that, given its visual nature, the new art form would be universal rather than national. However, by the 1930s—especially with the introduction of the “talkie”—national film became an issue of great importance. In the case of Hungary, the debate centered on the feature films' cinematic representation of Hungarianness. On the one hand—as in the case of tourism—stood those who imagined Hungary as a progressive, modern, and urbanizing nation. The stories of these movies were little different from those of Hollywood, with the modern Budapest middle class providing the subject matter. Movies such as *Hyppolit a lakáj* (Hyppolit the Butler), *Meseautó* (Dream Car), or *Havi 200 fix* (200-a-Month Salary), as David Frey puts it, “glamorized bourgeois values and luxury, technological and economic advance, and urban Budapest.”¹⁴⁸ These films, largely created by returning Hungarian Jews, painted a picture of Hungary as a progressive country, where people danced the foxtrot and enjoyed all that modern life had to offer. On the other hand, there were movies that situated Hungarianness in the recent past, in the stories of the countryside, and their subject matter was centered on peasants, aristocrats, and hussars. For the non-Jewish film elite and for conservative nationals, these images symbolized the true essence of Hungary.¹⁴⁹ Ultra-nationalist sentiment, anti-Semitism, and the influence of the German film industry were not the only reasons for this debate.

¹⁴⁷ Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 7.

¹⁴⁸ David S. Frey, “Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All: Film Stereotypes and Hungarian National Identity in the 1930s,” *Nationality Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002): 388.

¹⁴⁹ For more on this, see Anna Manchin, “Interwar Hungarian Entertainment Films and the Reinvention of Rural Modernity,” *Rural History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 195–212.

As David Frey's study points out, economic considerations also played a large role. The foreign moviegoing public was not interested in the same Hollywood-type (and Weimar Germany) middle-class pictures, for "debonair aristocrats, gypsy-music-singing peasants, cowboys on the Puszta plain, gentry nationalists—these were the images they knew and associated with Hungary."¹⁵⁰ In the *Nyugat* conference on film, Pál Fejős argued that Hungarian cinema could not compete with Hollywood. Instead, it needed to provide "exotica," which might be "kitsch" (*giccs*) but would open the American market to Hungarian films.¹⁵¹ As Hungary recovered from the Great Depression, the domestic film market changed. Peasants and workers became moviegoers, and studios started to make movies for domestic consumption featuring heroes and heroines the new audience could easily associate with: the nineteenth-century figures of hussars, noblemen, and peasants of the countryside.¹⁵²

Kulturfilme and newsreels, unlike feature films, were not primarily market-oriented, in that their function was not to make a profit but to inform the audience and present the country in the best possible light. As a result, interwar Hungarian *Kulturfilme* were a curious mixture of old and new, a combination of traditional and modern, and the fusion of country and city. The first attempt to produce such a picture especially for foreign audiences was the 1928 film *Hungária*, produced by the MFI and paid for by the KÜM. The Foreign Ministry received 200,000 pengő from the state budget (152/res. 1927) for "foreign film propaganda."¹⁵³ According to one of the cameramen, Tibor Megyer, the production required significant investment (cameras, copyeditor,

¹⁵⁰ Frey, "Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All," 390. See also Anna Manchín, "Imagining Modern Hungary through Film: Debates on National Identity, Modernity and Cinema in Early Twentieth-Century Hungary," in *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New Perspectives on European Cinema History*, ed. Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers (London: Routledge, 2012), 64–80.

¹⁵¹ "Az Amerikai filmről—Nyugat konferencia," *Nyugat* 24 (1932), <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00548/17146.htm> (accessed March 27, 2012).

¹⁵² Frey, "Aristocrats, Gypsies, and Cowboys All," 390.

¹⁵³ MOL K66, 164. csomó. Appendix to the 32.028/1928/Sajtó/H (March 19, 1928).

labeling apparatus, etc.).¹⁵⁴ Five cameramen worked in rotation under the supervision of a KÜM employee, Dr. Ernő Walter. In all they shot 10,000 meters of raw footage, which they carefully edited down to 1,800–2,200 meters.¹⁵⁵ The end product was the 1928 silent *Hungária*, an “Ode to the Remaining Hungarian Lands,” in eight acts.

The first scene plainly presents the grievances of post-Trianon Hungary. In line with the official stance, dictated by Prime Minister István Bethlen and the KÜM, revision of the treaty is the central theme of the first act. The accompanying subtitle reads as follows:

There was little attention paid to the Hungarians by the world. From under the shadows of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it only rarely burst through the Hungarian name. Yet it [Hungary] has been living in the heart of Europe for a thousand years. For one thousand years it has been standing guard on the peak of the Carpathians, so that behind it the West could build in peace. After one thousand years spent safeguarding the cross [now] the cross of Trianon was placed on its shoulders. This cross split this living organism into five parts. [Here a picture shows the map of the historical Kingdom of Hungary. The new borders are drawn in, and then the picture breaks into pieces.] The remaining rump, however, amazingly, through heroic efforts, under the leadership of noble Admiral Miklós Horthy [“vitéz nagybányai Horthy Miklós” in the original] continues to function, in order to be worthy of the traditions of the last one thousand years. [Image shows Horthy walking out of the palace and looking into the camera]¹⁵⁶

The country was a bastion of the West against the invading hordes, claims the film. This “Eastern Bastion of the West” mentality was, as previous chapters illustrated, one of the main tropes of Hungarian self-understanding. It was the country’s sacrifice that made it possible for the now-ungrateful West to grow and progress. Even after the “unjust” treaty, Hungary continued to thrive. The audience next sees

¹⁵⁴ Megyer, “A magyar filmhíradó,” 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *Hungária* (1928).

Count Albert Apponyi, who represented Hungary at the Paris Treaty negotiations, and Prime Minister Bethlen as they visit the countryside. As the film proceeds, one cannot help but see it as a celluloid résumé illustrating all that is positive or noteworthy: the Hungarian countryside with its picturesque scenery, its agriculture, its wine production (with special emphasis on Tokaj), and its folklore and village festivals, and sites of its past, with centuries-old castles, churches, and provincial centers. Occasionally the picture and the supplementary captioning make reference to the consequences of Trianon for Hungary's waterways or emphasize the fact that only the city of Sopron received the right to decide its future by plebiscite. Scenes then depict the state of Hungarian heavy industry and mining, before coming to Budapest with its cultural and tourist sites, and of course, the "world's number one spa city." A few pictures of Lillafüred are followed by images of Lake Balaton. After paying homage to the role of education, the film introduces the Hungarian Levente Association (mandatory youth organization) and the Hungarian triumphs in the Olympic Games and other sporting events. The closing images depict the St. Stephen's Day celebrations and the festive annual procession of the Holy Right Hand (the relic of St. Stephen).¹⁵⁷

Hungária (1928) received extraordinarily positive media coverage at home. Even before its release, the *Magyar Filmkurír* stated that at last cinema joined the "Hungarian cause," which was the revision of Trianon, and through this sort of propaganda, Hungary would acquire new friends. "For it was our national disaster," continued the piece, "that until now they [foreigners] did not know us, because if they had known us, if they had been aware that a highly cultured nation lives here that should never have been broken apart or balkanized, for it is a sin, then Trianon would not stand now as the darkest page of Hungarian history."¹⁵⁸ The exclusive domestic premiere of the picture was on August 23, 1927, at the Royal Apolló Theater. The audience included Hungarian and foreign dignitaries, among them Kuno Klebelsberg and Miklós Kozma. All the major newspapers reported the

¹⁵⁷ Description based on a 1977 line-by-line description of the movie. MNFA, TÖ 523.

¹⁵⁸ "Magyarország propagandája filmen—Hungária," *Magyar Filmkurír* (October 30, 1927): 1.

event, and all—even the left-leaning *Népszava*—gave it nothing but accolades. Nearly all the papers pointed out that the film was not made for the domestic audience; its purpose was to inform the rest of the world about the nation.

The government took all possible steps to distribute the film in Europe and America.¹⁵⁹ The KÜM spearheaded the foreign distribution of *Hungária* (1928), which was furnished with English-, French-, and German-language captions. Embassies and consulates in London, Washington, New York, Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, and Munich received copies and the authorization to distribute them in accordance with their best judgment.¹⁶⁰ The Great Powers were not the only targets. The KÜM paid for Italian- and Spanish-language copies (a free screening of the latter was held at the 1929 Barcelona World's Fair).¹⁶¹ At the request of the Hungarian Consulate in Helsinki, the KÜM financed the production of Finnish, Swedish, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian-language copies. There were even discussions about an Esperanto version.¹⁶² KÜM employees organized screenings in schools and cultural institutions, as well as at special events. One such special event took place on February 14, 1930, at the Svensk-Ungerska Sällskapet in Stockholm. The matinée screening began with a speech by vice-consul Sándor Kiss, who made clear the purpose of the program:

A few days ago I was asked by somebody whether this Hungarian film, which we will show you today, means that we want to make propaganda—yes or no. Well, to such a question the usual answer of a diplomat [*sic*] would have been an evasive one. But I went right into the matter and answered with plain yes. Yes, we mean propaganda by it. But all of us, you as well as I, are trying to make propaganda if we are abroad. We do try to make our

¹⁵⁹ “Nagy sikert aratott a bemutatón a Hungária c. propaganda-film,” *Nemzeti Újság* (August 24, 1929): 22.

The newspapers *Magyarság*, *A Mai Nap*, *Népszava*, *8 Órai Újság*, and *Pesti Hírlap* also covered the event.

¹⁶⁰ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (#30.330).

¹⁶¹ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (June 6, 1929).

¹⁶² MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (December 19, 1929); and MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (April 8, 1930).

country known to give the best possible idea of our nation and of our country to all those foreigners whom we meet. And anyone who does not think and act like this is not worthy of being called a son of his country!¹⁶³

The program, which in addition to the film also included Hungarian music, was a success. The audience, including diplomats, journalists, and members of the royal family, responded with enthusiasm. The local newspaper, *Stockholm Dagblad*, reported that indeed the “program was in service of propaganda, but it was a really appealing, elegant, and serene propaganda.”¹⁶⁴

Despite the seeming success of *Hungária* (1928), the film, and with it the Hungarian cultural-diplomatic campaign, faced a number of problems. First, there was competition. Other East and East-Central European countries also recognized the utility of film. Contemporary newspapers reported that the Polish and Czechoslovak movies made inroads into European markets, especially France.¹⁶⁵ The “grand Czech national film,” *Saint Wenceslas*, received one million crowns from the government.¹⁶⁶ Victor Velek’s outstanding study—which was published, tellingly, in 2010 to commemorate the September 28 Czech National Day—illustrates that after early problems, the Czechoslovak government stepped up and financed the making of *Saint Wenceslas*. The silent movie was a historical epic to commemorate the thousand-year anniversary of the martyrdom of Duke Wenceslas, “the highest symbol of Czech[oslovak] statehood and personification of humane values.”¹⁶⁷ Romania, Hungary’s other competitor on the international

¹⁶³ MOL K66, 164. csomó III-6/c (February 14, 1929). Original is in English.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Original Hungarian translation of the Swedish article.

¹⁶⁵ “És mi mit exportálunk?” *Magyar Filmkurir*, January 20, 1929, 6.

¹⁶⁶ “Nemzeti film készül egymillió állami támogatással,” *Magyar Filmkurir*, January 5, 1930, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Victor Velek, *Saint Wenceslas: The First Czechoslovak Historical Epic Film*, trans. Radek Blaheta (Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2010), http://www.vlada.cz/assets/tema/SvVaclavBooklet-verze05-_anglicka_.pdf (accessed September 30, 2011). The film premiered on April 19, 1930. An earlier and different version of the film, *Saint Wenceslas Relics* (Svatováclavské památky), premiered on November 28, 1928.

stage, also utilized cinema to shape foreign public opinion. The Romanian Ministry of National Propaganda (1927–1936) took charge of documentary film production and hired domestic and foreign companies and professionals. Under its aegis, writes Romanian film historian Manuela Cernat, in 1929 the company Romania Film released *Romania Today—Picturesque Romania (Romania Azi—Romania Pittoresca)*.¹⁶⁸ The 3,200-meter film, directed by Iosif Bertok, depicted national themes much as *Hungária* (1928) had done: it illustrated Romania's past and present, its tourist sites, its industry and agriculture, and the capital, Bucharest. The film premiered on November 29, 1929, in the Bucharest National Theater, beginning an eight-year domestic and foreign tour.¹⁶⁹

The second great challenge was the introduction of sound film or "talkies." On October 6, 1927, Warner Bros. released the first true talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson. Another Al Jolson feature, *The Singing Fool*, was the first talkie shown in Hungary, on September 29, 1929. It was not until 1931 that the first Hungarian-made talkie premiered, *A kék bálvány* (The Blue Idol). Despite high expectations, the movie was not a commercial success. However, *Hyppolit a lakáj*, released in the same year, was a great hit with Hungarian audiences.¹⁷⁰ The KÜM received reports stating that *Hungária* (1928), while a success, could no longer accomplish its objectives due to the triumph of sound film. The MFI offered to make a new, sound version of *Hungária*, which was to be one of the crowning achievements of Hungarian cultural diplomacy.¹⁷¹

Making a talkie required a great deal of money. The Great Depression left the country's treasury in a precarious situation, meaning that the government could not finance the remake by itself. The original estimate called for 40,000 pengő, which would not include the required

¹⁶⁸ Manuela Cernat, *A Concise History of the Romanian Film*, trans. Andrei Bantas (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982), 22.

¹⁶⁹ Information available on the Romanian website Cinemagia, <http://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/romania-azi-30288/> (accessed October 4, 2011).

¹⁷⁰ Nemeskürty, *Word and Image*, 72–77.

¹⁷¹ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (June 5, 1932); MOL K66, 218. csomó III-6/c (New York, October 11, 1932); and MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (June 3, 1933).

number of prints. The KÜM appealed to various sources. In the end the movie was paid for by contributions from governmental and semi-governmental circles and the leading sections of Hungarian industry (the latter included two of the greatest Jewish industrial barons, Ferenc Chorin and Leó Goldberger):

KÜM	10,000 pengő
MÁV (Hungarian State Railways)	10,000 pengő
Budapest Székesfőváros (Budapest Metropolis)	10,000 pengő
Goldberger Textile Works	5,000 pengő
Manfréd Weiss Works	5,000 pengő
United Incandescent Lamp and Electrics Company	5,000 pengő
Hungarian Rubber Ware Factory	5,000 pengő
Szent Lukács Gyógyfürdő (St. Lukács Thermal Baths)	1,000 pengő
Total	51,000 pengő

The result was the 1934 version of *Hungária*.¹⁷² The final cost of the 1,522-meter-long film was 42,000 pengő. The MFI was committed to making *Hungária* (1934) a quality product. The art direction was the work of László Kandó, a painter; the accompanying music was the work of Ernő Dohnányi and Sándor László; and the camerawork was by István Somkúti.

The film begins with a modeling-clay map of historical Hungary being cut up by a bayonet. Once again, the opening caption summarizes the Hungarian position regarding the validity of the Trianon Treaty: "The people of this cruelly and imprudently mutilated country persistently strive to bring forth a future that is worthy of its grand past. Its rich culture presented much to the European civilization, but it also faithfully guards the ancient genuineness of its eastern origin." The second sentence provided the guiding principle to combine the tradi-

¹⁷² In Zsolt Kőhádi's otherwise excellent study, he misidentifies the date of release as 1931. See Zsolt Kőhádi, "A magyar film hangot keres, 1931–1938," *Filmspirál* 2, no. 1 (1996): 78.

tional and modern elements of Hungary and present them as equally essential components of the national character. The opening scene takes the audience to the Austro-Hungarian border village of Horvátjárfalu.¹⁷³ Here a refined border guard politely checks the incoming German-speaking tourists' passports and informs them (in German) about the length and the condition of the road to Budapest ("200 km on a very good highway"). The next scenes suggest alternative ways to reach Budapest, by a modern train or by a ship on the Danube. The Budapest images aim to illustrate the metropolitan nature of the city, which harmoniously coexists with its historical sites. The "world's first spa city" is emphasized through lively pictures of thermal baths and the wave pool of the Hotel Gellért. Once again, sport motifs are stressed as the audience learns about the Hungarian accomplishments in the Olympic Games, water polo, rowing, track and field, soccer, tennis, boxing, gymnastics, fencing, and the somewhat less "Hungarian" sports of waterskiing and polo. A lengthy part of the film shows agricultural production, which utilizes both "ancient and modern" methods. The scenes of harvest festivals, with the indispensable Gypsy violinist and the *csárdás*, add an exotic look to the traditional village life. It is interesting, and somewhat perplexing, that the movie's second sound bite is of the noise ("*pi-pi*") a man makes while calling the household's turkeys. As the film continues, the audience learns that while Hungary is an agricultural country, its industry has achieved "European significance." To illustrate this point (and to make the sponsors happy), the Manfréd Weiss Works and the Goldberger Textile Works are shown in great detail.

After these scenes of modernity, the audience is transported to the serene countryside of the Great Plains, where herds of horses and cattle roam free. The provincial cityscapes of Szeged, Debrecen, Veszprém, Pécs, and Sopron appear before the film reaches Lake Balaton and its "capital," Keszthely. Once again, the audience sees the mixture of old (the medieval abbey of Tihany) and new (motorboats on the lake). The film's last scene offers a clearly political message: "The Hungarian nation's devout struggle—which seeks life, peace, culture, and a better

¹⁷³ Today's Jarovce, near Bratislava. Ironically enough, this was one of the three settlements ceded to Czechoslovakia after World War II.

future—trusting in God and the youth of Hungary, led by the reviver of the maimed country, Miklós Horthy.” The regent, accompanied by the palace guards, appears in the St. Stephen’s Day procession while surveying the troops at the Fourth International World Scout Jamboree (1933), held in Gödöllő. In the last images, the Hungarian national anthem serves as the background music. The last scene of the film slowly zooms in on a campfire surrounded by youth. The last sound heard is their shout: “Hajrá!” (Let’s go!)¹⁷⁴

The film was less confrontational in tone than its 1928 counterpart. With the clear exception of the beginning and the end, there was no obvious depiction of irredentism. There were no irredentist statues; no discussion of the creek that, during the peace negotiations, was supposedly introduced as a navigable river; and no mention of plebiscites. Nor was there a direct message about unjust suffering. Second, Horthy was the only political figure pictured. Bethlen and Apponyi did not appear in the 1934 version. The film’s main goal was to provide an informative and enlightening picture of Hungary and to get Hungary noticed as a tourist destination. To this end, the film harmoniously combined the old and the new and sought to provide evidence of Hungary’s uniqueness rooted in its traditional countryside. The pictures of the *puszta* and its people, accompanied by carefully selected folk music, served this purpose. On the other hand, the film also sought to dismiss the stereotypical representation of Hungary. Hungary was unique, not backward. To further prove this point, the modern scenes of industry and cosmopolitan Budapest were accompanied by modern music selected by Ernő Dohnányi. However, the goal was the same: creating a positive image of Hungary abroad in order to gain support for the country’s revisionist goals.

The film premiered in March 1934 at the Royal Apolló. The audience included Miklós Horthy, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kálmán Kánya, and two of Hungary’s future prime ministers, Béla Imrédy and Kálmán Darányi. The domestic press praised the film, and one paper argued that *Hungária* (1934) was a testament to Hungary’s willingness to live, create, and work despite

¹⁷⁴ The above description is based on a copy of the original movie. I would like to express my gratitude to the director of the MNFA, Vera Gyürey, for allowing me to copy the film and to Attila Pók for facilitating this exchange.

Trianon.¹⁷⁵ In addition to the Hungarian version, three German, four French, one Italian, and two English versions appeared.¹⁷⁶ The contract between the KÜM and the MFI (represented by Baron Lajos Villáni and Zoltán Taubinger, respectively) allocated 60 percent of any profits to the Foreign Ministry and 40 percent to the film studio. The MFI and the KÜM decided that the latter was to be responsible for distribution in Germany, France, Switzerland, the United States, Scandinavia, and South America.¹⁷⁷

Hungária (1934) traveled far and achieved great success. The KÜM, wherever possible, attempted to sell the distribution rights. Both commercial and political considerations led to this decision. For example, Villáni negotiated a contact with the French Leo Film Company that allowed the distribution of *Hungária* (1934) in France, Holland, Belgium, and their colonies, as well as Luxembourg. The Hungarian foreign representative institutions and agencies retained the right to screen the movie at special showings, free of charge.¹⁷⁸ Similar negotiations were carried out with Gaumont-British Pictures in the UK, LUCE in Italy, and UFA in Germany.¹⁷⁹ The latter allowed *Hungária* (1934) to be screened in all UFA cinemas and a shorter version to be sent with all UFA-made movies to all German cinemas—albeit in exchange for free copies.¹⁸⁰ In order to avoid the whiff of propaganda, the film was often screened under the sponsorship of various friendship societies not directly connected with governmental institutions. For example, in Italy, the film premiered in Rome on April 26, 1934, under the aegis of the Amici dell' Ungheria (Friends of Hungary) society.¹⁸¹ Similarly, in Paris the film premiered under the aegis of a society (*Comité des Amitiés Franco-Hongroises*) created by the embassy staff for that occasion. To avoid any possible charge of propaganda, the opening scene—with the bayonet slicing up the map—was omitted,

¹⁷⁵ "Hangos Hungária," *Filmkultura*, April 1, 1934, 5.

¹⁷⁶ MOL K66, 378. csomó III-6/c (April 6, 1934).

¹⁷⁷ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (March 23, 1934).

¹⁷⁸ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (July 25, 1934).

¹⁷⁹ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (April 12, 1934).

¹⁸⁰ MOL K66, 265. csomó III-6/c (March 22, 1935). This document is about the negotiations. I could not locate the final contract.

¹⁸¹ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (May 5, 1934).

and a French publicist introduced the film.¹⁸² The embassy reported that the first two showings were a “smash hit” (*bomba siker*). The KÜM gave the embassies plenty of freedom to edit the film as they judged fit—for example, to cut the length of the industry scene or order additional captioning.¹⁸³ In New York the film premiered on board the S.S. *Hamburg* at an event sponsored by the American-Hungarian Academy of Art. A *New York Evening Post* journalist delivered the opening remarks.¹⁸⁴ By 1937 eighteen Hungarian embassies and consulates, from Washington, D.C., and Buenos Aires to Teheran, owned at least one copy of the film.¹⁸⁵ *Hungária* (1934) was also successfully screened in Ankara, Algiers, and São Paulo; in 1937 it was shown in twenty-four cities in northern Brazil on forty different occasions.¹⁸⁶

Gauging the success of *Hungária* (1934) internationally is difficult. However, the main point, one could argue, was that the government believed that the film was a great success. Embassy reports praised its artistic direction and musical score. The international print media also reported on the picture. For example, according to one report, the screening of the film was so successful in Holland that even *Het Volk*, a publication of Dutch Social Democrats traditionally opposed to Hungarian political and revisionist aims, praised it as “excellent propaganda about an interesting country.” Moreover, the report emphasized, it brought the question of Trianon to the forefront and argued that the minority question was obviously still not remedied.¹⁸⁷ If the goal was to become visible on the international stage, the *Hungária* movies succeeded.

Prompted by this success, the government financed future *Kulturfilme* to promote Hungary abroad. These films advertised Hungary as a tourist destination (both modern Budapest and the serene countryside), introduced the accomplishments of Hungarian horticulture,

¹⁸² MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (Paris, July 6, 1934).

¹⁸³ MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (Paris, July 12, 1934).

¹⁸⁴ MOL K66, 240. csomó III 6/c (pp. 525 and 559).

¹⁸⁵ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (pp. 33–34).

¹⁸⁶ MOL K66, 265. csomó III-6/c (Rio de Janeiro, November 10, 1937).

¹⁸⁷ Original Hungarian translation of the Dutch article, part of the 1600/1934 report. MOL K66, 240. csomó III-6/c (The Hague, June 7, 1934). See also Frey, *National Cinema*, 192.

and promoted the St. Stephen myth. The Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the KÜM, and other governmental and semi-governmental organizations financed the production of *Hallali* (a French word for horn that signals the end of the hunt); *Budapest Fürdőváros* (Spa City Budapest); *Magyar falu* (Hungarian Village); *A magyar falu mosolya* (The Smile of the Hungarian Village); *A magyar nép derüje* (The Radiance of the Hungarian Folk); *A magyar falu művészete* (Art of the Hungarian Village); *Magyar ló* (Hungarian Horse); *Magyar bor* (Hungarian Wine); *Magyar gyümölcs* (Hungarian Fruit); *Vadászat Magyarországon* (Hunting in Hungary); *Szent István, a magyarok első királya* (St. Stephen, the First King of the Hungarians); and others introducing Hungarian swine, cattle, and poultry husbandry. These films were screened at world's fairs and film festivals, where they received awards and certificates of merit.¹⁸⁸ A German-language copy of *Vadászat Magyarországon* was sent to Herman Göring as a personal gift for his support of the Hungarian Hunting Exhibit in Berlin.¹⁸⁹

The government circles' and the film elites' continuing support of *Kulturfilme* was not uniquely Hungarian. Government correspondence and media sources show that many nations in Europe and beyond made use of the genre. For example, during the Seventh Venice Biennale in 1939, thirteen nations, from Hungary to South Africa, exhibited no fewer than fifty-six *Kulturfilme*.¹⁹⁰ Romania had established its National Cinema Office (1936) with the mandate to produce documentaries and newsreels.¹⁹¹ Two of their *Kulturfilme*—*Bukovine, pays des monastères* and *Au pays des "Motz"*—were screened at Venice, to the great irritation of the Hungarian government. The latter, *Au pays des "Motz"* or *Țara Moșilor* in Romanian, was directed by the "father of Romanian cinema," Paul Călinescu, who won the top honor in the *Kulturfilm* category. The film represented the life of the Moți people, inhabitants of the northwest Transylvanian Apușeni Mountains, a region which, a year later, under the provisions of the Second Vienna Award, became part of Hungary. To the KÜM, the Romanian movie

¹⁸⁸ "Kultúrfilm," *Magyar Film*, February 18, 1939, 15.

¹⁸⁹ MOL K66, 378. csomó III-6/c (February 26, 1938).

¹⁹⁰ "A VII. velencei nemzetközi filmversenyen bemutatott játékfilmek és kultúrfilmek jegyzéke," *Magyar Film*, September 30, 1939, 5–6.

¹⁹¹ Cernat, *A Concise History of the Romanian Film*, 34.

industry and its success at Venice represented a danger to Hungarian interests. Baron Villáni ordered the Bucharest embassy to pay special attention to this. If any Romanian films expressed anti-Magyar sentiment, the embassy was to report to the KÜM, so that Villáni, using international agreements and friendly relations, could limit or ask to censor the screening of those films abroad.¹⁹² The 1930s saw a rise in the significance of *Kulturfilme*. The genre became an accepted, even preferred, tool of cultural diplomacy. Yet it was not the only type of cinematic production that attracted the attention of the governments.

The *Magyar Híradó* was the product of the MFI from 1924 onward, and over time, it came to hold a monopoly on newsreel production. Even though the company did not receive further direct financial support from the government's Film Fund, it remained a major shareholder in the company. In the beginning the *Magyar Híradó* was a rather primitive enterprise, with only two cameramen and hardly any foreign connections. The *Híradó* was slow in production and remained silent, which created a great deal of tension with cinema owners. According to Tibor Megyer's manuscript, only in 1929 was he sent to England to study the Fox Movietone sound system.¹⁹³ In 1930 another milestone occurred in the development of the Hungarian newsreel, when Fox Movietone News filmed a sound report on Miklós Horthy. The report included a speech from the regent, both in Hungarian and English, that was screened globally.¹⁹⁴ By the spring of 1931, the MFI had purchased the German Tobis-Klang system, which, when fitted into a car, made it possible to create on-site reports. The first Hungarian sound newsreel premiered in September 1931. The news changed its name to *Magyar Világhíradó* (Hungarian World News), signaling this achievement and its future aspirations.

The *Magyar Világhíradó* (henceforth: MV newsreel) was both a business and a political venture. To make the MV newsreels relevant and commercially successful, the MFI signed newsreel exchanges with a number of foreign news agencies, including the French Éclair-

¹⁹² "Paul Calinescu; Father of Romanian Cinema," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2000, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/mar/28/news/mn-13552> (accessed October 11, 2011).

¹⁹³ MOL K66, 420. csomó III-6/c (September 6, 1939).

¹⁹⁴ Megyer, "A magyar filmhíradó," 4.

Journal, the German UFA-Tonwoche, the Austrian Selenophon, and the British Gaumont. What was to be included in the news, what was to be received from and sent abroad, was decided during the weekly executive committee meetings. The government remained visible in the decision-making process, but the selection was not solely political, as demonstrated by the membership of the executive board. For example, during the July 27, 1933, executive meeting, the MFI was represented by Miklós Kozma and Zoltán Taubinger, the KÜM by Baron Lajos Villáni, and the VKM by Lóránd Horváth.¹⁹⁵

What did a typical MV newsreel include in 1933? The 240-meter MV newsreel #492 contained the following reports: 1) "Discount Cruises to Vienna," 2) "Passion Plays in Budaörs" (Hungary), 3) "World's Scout Jamboree at Gödöllő" (Hungary), 4) "Hungarian Triumphs in London" (track and field), 5) "July 14th in France" (from *Éclair-Journal*), 6) "[Wiley] Post's Flight around the World" (from UFA-Tonwoche), and 7) "French National Sailing Championship" (from *Éclair-Journal*). The newsreels containing pictures of the World Jamboree, of Hungarian female athletes, and of passion plays were sent abroad.¹⁹⁶ News was informative but not entirely apolitical. The selection of items sent abroad suggests that the MFI promoted the country's culture in accordance with Hungarian cultural diplomacy's main themes, that of publicizing the country's international status and its commitment to Christianity.

At times the MV newsreel had to take a more directly political stance. During the Marseilles crisis, in the same way as radio with its international broadcast, MV produced a 250-meter-long special report on the plight of the Hungarian refugees. The the MFI produced twenty-eight copies and, using its connections with various foreign news services, the report was distributed in Germany, Austria, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the United States.¹⁹⁷ By special envoy they also sent a copy to Geneva, where the League of Nations was discussing the charges against Hungary. According to

¹⁹⁵ "Nagybányai vitéz Horthy Miklós, Magyarország kormányzója magyarul és angolul megszólalt a hangosfilmen," *Filmkultura*, January 1, 1930, 1–2.

¹⁹⁶ MFI Executive Committee Meeting on July 27, 1933 (henceforth "MFI Meeting").

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

the MFI minutes, the KÜM and the Hungarian delegation to Geneva expressed their appreciation for the specially made film, for it was “seriously useful.”¹⁹⁸

To increase the influence of the MV newsreel, the MFI continued to seek new contacts in the international news community. By 1936 the MFI sought to find a way to distribute the MV in the neighboring countries. The transaction was designed as a *quid pro quo*, without monetary exchange. As the discussion surrounding the deals shows, both the KÜM and the MFI realized the potential influence of the MV on ethnic Hungarians living in the successor states. The first contact was with the Prague-based Elekta-Journal (later with the also-Prague-based Aktualita) and was soon followed by an agreement with Zagreb-based Svetolon.¹⁹⁹ In 1937 negotiations began with the Romanian ONT News, which was under the supervision of Romanian government circles.²⁰⁰

The relationship between the MFI and the KÜM was quite peculiar and not without difficulties. As mentioned earlier, the KÜM owned 40 percent of the MFI's shares and the government remained the company's main—one could say sole—customer. However, in 1935–1936, Kozma became the minister of interior and successfully lobbied to change the existing division of labor between Hunnia and the MFI (feature films versus *Kulturfilme* and news). While the MFI embarked on the production of feature films, it did not receive money from the Film Fund. The KÜM began to apply increasing pressure on the MFI with regard to programming, which had been based on reciprocation with other countries and remained rather civil. Villáni expressed the wishes of the KÜM that the MFI make an effort to place political news in Czechoslovakia through its connections with Elekta-Journal. The polite, but firmly negative, answer from the MFI pointed out that in 1936, Elekta had received and screened fifteen Hungarian-related reports, while the MV had screened only four Czechoslovak-related ones. The letter went on to say that unwanted pressure on the Czechoslovak partner would not only jeopardize the results achieved

¹⁹⁸ MFI Meeting on December 13, 1934. MOL K66, 335. csomó III-6/c/1 (December 13, 1934).

¹⁹⁹ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (February 4, 1937).

²⁰⁰ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (October 23, 1937).

to date but would destroy the relationship.²⁰¹ At the same time, the KÜM instructed its representative in Prague to pay extra attention to the subject matter of Czechoslovak news. There is little documentation on the actual results of this exchange, but one report on the 1937 Italian royal and governmental visit to Budapest indeed made it into the Czechoslovak news. The Prague representative of the KÜM was unhappy with the quality of the one-minute report and called it “a mockery of the spirit of the Hungarian-Czech film exchange agreement.”²⁰²

Another issue that further poisoned the relations between the government and the MFI arose in late 1937, when the MFI decided to raise its capital stock by 150,000 pengő; the KÜM refused to take part in the increase, and its share decreased to 20 percent. An internal KÜM memo testifies that the ministry was fearful of relinquishing its seat on the board of the executive committee and argued that the KÜM could not afford to surrender its influence and control of MFI matters, for *Kulturfilme* and newsreels were the “most effective and grandest instrument of propaganda.”²⁰³ Unfortunately, there is no documentation on the outcome of these negotiations, but presumably the government and the MFI found a solution. I base this assumption on a number of facts. First, the MFI retained its monopoly and continued to be the sole producers of *Kulturfilme* and newsreels. Second, the KÜM actually intervened at the Finance Ministry on the behalf of the MFI so the latter could receive special consideration for its exports. Third, the Ministry of Interior Order 54.100/1939 stipulated that 30 percent of all “shorts” screened in the cinemas had to be Hungarian-made (that is, MFI-made).²⁰⁴ Lastly, Baron Villányi’s presence at the weekly meeting of the executive board suggests that the KÜM retained its influence.²⁰⁵ There were fewer and fewer colorful reports about swimsuit fashions in Miami, the Tour de France, dancing Japanese mice, and the Miss Europe competition. The news became dominated

²⁰¹ MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (December 6, 1936).

²⁰² MOL K66, 336. csomó III-6/c/2 (Prague, May 31, 1937).

²⁰³ MOL K66, 335. csomó III-6/c/1 (December 4, 1937).

²⁰⁴ Ministry of Interior 54.100/1939 order in *Magyar Film*, June 10, 1939, 11.

²⁰⁵ For example, see MFI Meeting on March 30, 1939. MOL K66, 420. csomó III-6/c (March 30, 1939).

by domestic and foreign political reports. Of course, this could have been due to the worsening international situation. But it could also be that the MFI finally became the unofficial “mouthpiece” of the Hungarian government.

Conclusion

With the outbreak of hostilities, both radio and newsreels became overtly political instruments. For example, the new 31-kilowatt station at Košice (now once again Kassa) began broadcasting in 1942, following a significant investment to replace an apparatus taken by Czechoslovak authorities. By then a small broadcasting station was also in operation in Cluj (Koložsvár) with the stated goal of achieving a broadcasting monopoly throughout Transylvania, especially in those regions populated by ethnic Hungarians.²⁰⁶ The plan to build a powerful new station did not come to fruition. There were also plans to build a film studio in Cluj.²⁰⁷ Under the influence of growing anti-Semitism, supported by the Anti-Jewish Laws, radio and film production was restructured to create a Christian-national culture.²⁰⁸ A great number of artists left the country, including Béla Bartók, famed director István Székely, and Hungarian film star Gyula Kabos.²⁰⁹ Other highly successful directors, like Viktor Gertler and László Gaál, were forced out of the industry (the latter was killed by the Hungarian Arrow Cross sometime in 1944).²¹⁰ László Cs. Szabó, director of radio literary programming, tried to maintain a level of independent programming while asking friends abroad to help find positions for some of his

²⁰⁶ MRA, “Kiséreti rádióállomás Koložsváron,” *8 Órai Újság*, September 21, 1940; and “Halló, itt Koložsvár,” *Antenna*, October 6, 1940.

²⁰⁷ I thank David Frey for this information.

²⁰⁸ Tibor Sándor, *Őrsékváltás, a magyar film és a szélsőjobb oldal a harmincas-negyvenes években* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992).

²⁰⁹ Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 51. See also Tibor Sándor, *Őrsékváltás után: Zsidókérdés és filmpolitika 1938–1944* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1997).

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Jewish friends.²¹¹ Miklós Kozma, shortly before his death, became the governor of the Sub-Carpathian region annexed by Hungary and was directly responsible for depriving the region's Jewish population of their legal rights, including the right to own property. As a result, he was indirectly responsible for the murder of 10,000–15,000 Hungarian Jews who did not have citizenship papers and were thus deported and murdered at Kamenets-Podolsk by the Einsatzgruppen in August 1941.²¹²

Both radio and film production tried to serve the government's efforts to keep Hungary out of war, but without much success. Radio, just like the government, oscillated between a German and an Anglo-American direction. In March 1940, the MTHR received orders from the KÜM to avoid any broadcasts that could be construed as anti-Soviet.²¹³ After the Hungarian declaration of war—actually, there was no official declaration but rather a statement that Hungary and the Soviet Union were at war—the broadcasts addressed the West and tried to persuade them that the war against the USSR was defensive. The shortwave broadcast, albeit in diminishing quality and capacity, carried various reports about the Bolshevik danger to Europe, and Hungary's role in defense of Christendom, to name but a few of the typical programs.²¹⁴ Radio was instrumental on October 15, 1944, when the Hungarian government sought to make a separate peace with the Allied Powers. A few hours later, fascist thugs from the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party occupied the radio building; people were arrested, and some were even killed. On December 24, 1944, after nearly two decades of innovation and growth, Radio Budapest was silenced. The pride of Kozma's radio, the 120-kilowatt Lakihegy station, was blown up by German forces.²¹⁵ Film production fared somewhat better—

²¹¹ MOL K613, 100. csomó, 79. tétel (October 21, 1939). Cs. Szabó's letter to Watson Kirkconnell (Canadian translator of Hungarian poetry) asking to find a position for a young sociologist, Béla Reitzer. Cs. Szabó was not successful, and Reitzer died in a labor battalion in 1942.

²¹² Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér*, 753–69. Ormos suggests—albeit without much evidence—that the knowledge that he unwillingly became an accomplice in the murders may have contributed to Kozma's heart attack, which killed him on December 7, 1941, at age 57.

²¹³ MOL K429, 14. doboz (March 16, 1940).

²¹⁴ MOL K615, 1. csomó (RH 1940–42).

²¹⁵ Kollega Tarsoly, ed., *Magyarország a XX. században*, 376–78.

especially that of feature films.²¹⁶ In the end, to paraphrase Harold N. Graves, Jr., former director of the Princeton Listening Center, radio and film was initially used mainly to provide entertainment. However, not unlike gunpowder, which was initially used to make fireworks, these instruments of entertainment were slowly transformed into instruments of competition and ultimately made into instruments of war.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ The film industry, by then “Christianized,” sought to retain a level of cultural sovereignty vis-à-vis Germany. As David Frey’s study indicates, the new, and surprising, destination of Hungarian feature films was Yugoslavia. See David S. Frey, “Hungarian Film in the Shadow of the Swastika, 1933–1945,” in *Cinema and the Swastika: The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 159–72.

²¹⁷ Harold N. Graves, Jr., *War on the Short Wave* (Headline Books no. 30) (New York: Foreign Policy Association Inc., May 1941). Graves, as director of the Princeton Listening Center, was responsible for recording and transcribing over 7,000 broadcasts originating abroad and intended for American audiences

Conclusion

“It is perfectly true, of course, that good cultural propaganda cannot remedy the damage done by a bad foreign policy, but it is no exaggeration to say that even the best of diplomatic policies may fail, if it neglects the task of interpretation which modern conditions impose.”

— *Anthony Eden*, 1937¹

In relation to interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden’s point about the connection between cultural propaganda, or cultural diplomacy, and foreign policy is apropos. Even if one accepts that Hungary carried out “good” cultural propaganda, it certainly could not remedy the leadership’s “bad” foreign policy, which was a result of the country’s unrelenting pursuit of territorial revision and mistaken interpretation of geopolitical realities.

The main leitmotif of interwar Hungarian foreign policy was revisionism. Changing the postwar borders was, without a doubt, the foremost goal of all Hungarian governments. Even during the early years of

¹ Quoted in Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans. Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 50–51.

the Bethlen regime, when the focus was on the country's economic and political consolidation, revisionism—albeit covertly—remained central to Hungary's future self-image. No political party could have simply accepted the enormous losses of Trianon. Eden was right, but Hungary was not Great Britain. Postwar Hungary had neither the power (military or otherwise) nor the moral authority to implement a successful or “good” foreign policy. The generally Anglophile political elite turned to Italy because Mussolini was willing to listen. Germany and Hungary shared a desire to alter the postwar status quo, and this might have even actually linked them in a kind of *Waffenbruderschaft*. But this did not mean that Hungarian diplomacy would not try to make inroads with both greater and lesser powers.

The 1938 *Anschluss* and the subsequent Munich Conference convinced politicians, including Teleki, that the future of Hungary, and East-Central Europe in general, would be determined by its relationship with Berlin. Accordingly, Hungary inched closer and closer to Nazi Germany. The territorial gains of the First Vienna Award seemed to justify this policy; they blinded Hungarians with the prospect of further territorial gains, and meant that few considered the price. If we can believe György Barcza, Hungarian ambassador in London, Teleki was one of those few. According to Barcza, the prime minister complained to him that it was the Hungarian obsession with revisionism that was the “gravest danger.” He continued: “Public opinion gone mad. Return it all! [*Mindent vissza!*] In any way, by any who, at any price . . . the Germans know this well, and they prey on this . . . the soldiers want to fight side by side with the Germans, and the regent listens to them . . . everybody is making politics based on emotion. No one wants to believe me that this is going to be the end of us. It is the revisionism that will ruin us and that is going to carry us into war.”² When the war broke out, Teleki's government sought to keep Hungary out of the conflict, yet he too was unwilling or unable to give up the idea of recovering more lost territories. After his death, Hungary rapidly moved toward disaster. On June 26, 1941, Hungary declared itself to be at war with the Soviet Union, albeit without an

² Barcza, *Diplomataemlékeim*, vol. 1, 445–46. István Bethlen also warned against closing ranks with Berlin.

official declaration. On August 8, Hungary passed the Third Anti-Jewish Law, which prohibited marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Gentiles. On December 6, Great Britain declared war on Hungary. On December 12, Hungary declared war on the United States. In January 1943, the 200,000-man Second Hungarian Army fought the Red Army at Voronezh. The result was catastrophic: 40,000 Hungarian soldiers dead, 35,000 injured, and about 60,000 captured.³ Prime Minister Miklós Kállay tried to renew contact with the West and even with the Soviet Union to seek a separate peace. Hungarian leadership, as László Borhi's newest work illustrates, still operated under the false belief that Hungary was geopolitically too important to Great Britain and the United States to ignore.⁴ On March 19, 1944, German troops occupied Hungary. Between May 15 and the end of June, under new prime minister Döme Sztójay, Hungarian authorities, in collaboration with the SS, deported 440,000 Jews, mostly to Auschwitz. In addition, thousands of Gypsies shared a similar fate. In early July, Horthy put an end to the deportations, thus sparing approximately 200,000 Budapest Jews from deportation. In a last-ditch effort, various official and semiofficial circles, including a group led by Miklós Horthy, Jr., and Domokos Szent-Iványi, colleague, student, and friend of the late Pál Teleki, tried to initiate peace talks with the West and the Soviet Union. In a radio address on October 15, 1944, the elder Horthy proclaimed an armistice. However, by this time he did not command the loyalty of the necessary political and military forces. On the very next day, under professional and personal duress, Horthy resigned and relinquished power to the leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi. Under his regime of terror, tens of thousands of Jews were murdered, and his thugs began the summary execution of other Hungarian civilians. On December 21, 1944, a Provisional National Assembly met in Debrecen and elected a new national government with Béla Dálnoki Miklós as its prime minister.⁵ By this time the Red Army had encir-

³ Romsics, *Magyarország*, 257.

⁴ László Borhi, *Nagyhatalmi érdekek hálójában* (Budapest: MTA BTK TTI-Osiris, 2015), 38–40.

⁵ Juhász, *Foreign Policy of Hungary*, 208–333 *passim*.

cled Budapest. During the 102-day siege, 38,000 civilians died, along with 40,000 German and Hungarian soldiers and about 80,000 Red Army troops.⁶

On April 13, 1945, the war ended in Hungary. The results were tragic: approximately 900,000 dead and 600,000 in Soviet POW camps. About 40 percent of the national wealth was destroyed.⁷ The Soviet troops' incredible sacrifice liberated the country. However, liberation was also accompanied by mass rape, deportations, and the beginning of a different occupation, which lasted until 1989. On February 10, 1947, Hungarian representatives signed a treaty in Paris. Despite designs for a federalized reconstruction of the region and plans for new borders based on ethnic composition, the Paris Treaty essentially reestablished the Trianon borders.⁸

Hungarian historiography concerning interwar foreign policy has established the concepts of "(constrained) latitude" (*korlátozott mozgástér*) and "forced path" (*kényszerpálya*). This is not the place to engage with that debate, especially because it can take one dangerously close to "what if" questions.⁹ Nevertheless, a few words may be germane, not necessarily about what was really constrained and what was forced, but about the mistaken views that Hungarians had about the role and importance of their country.

Interwar Hungarian diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy, failed to achieve its goal because it was built on seriously flawed assumptions. First, there was the elite's mistaken belief in the inherent and

⁶ For more on this, see Krisztián Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁷ Romsics, *Magyarország*, 269–70.

⁸ For more on the post-World War II designs, see Ignác Romsics, *Múltról a mának* (Budapest, Osiris Kiadó: 2004), 264–83.

⁹ For some of the latest on this, see Géza Jeszenszky, "Kényszerpálya vezetett-e Magyarország német megszállásához?" *Magyar Szemle* 23, nos. 11–12 (2014), http://www.magyszemle.hu/cikk/20141217_kenyszerpalya_vezetett-e_magyarorszag_nemet_megszallasahoz_ (accessed July 15, 2015); Géza Jeszenszky, "Hungary in the Second World War: Tragic Blunders or Destiny?" *Hungarian Review* 5, no. 2 (2014), http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/20140314_hungary_in_the_second_world_war_tragic_blunders_or_destiny_ (accessed July 15, 2015). For a study that seeks to incorporate international relations into the debate, focusing on 1942–1944, see Borhi, *Nagyhatalmi érdekek hálójában*, 33–76.

obvious greatness of Hungary and the justice of its cause. Their error was trusting that cultural-diplomatic tools could gather enough international support for treaty revision. As this study shows, their efforts to prove the country's alleged cultural superiority and European character did not stop at empty phrases and slogans. Between 1919 and 1941, but especially after 1927, under the government's direction, the country's cultural production underwent a wide-ranging modernization. With the assistance of the intellectual and industrial elite, the Hungarian government established cultural and academic institutions abroad and founded scholarly publications. To attract visitors, they mobilized the country's nascent tourist industry. Last but not least, the government utilized opportunities provided by radio and cinema. In the end, illustrating the country's historical and cultural ties to Europe and demonstrating Hungary's modernity were of little political value in the age of power politics.

The second mistaken assumption was the belief that Hungarian problems carried significant weight in an international system dominated by the interests of the Great Powers. There were people who recognized this mistake. For example, one intellectual wrote the following about English public opinion:

We Hungarians are suffocating here at the eastern borders of European civilization; we live in Central Europe and think of ourselves as being in Europe. For us the world is Europe, world politics is the politics of Europe; international questions are European questions. . . . The Englishman can feel that he is in the center of the world. He is the overlord of a kind of empire where the sun never sets and one that oversees the lives of one-quarter of humanity. . . . England thinks in continents, while for us Europe is the world. . . . In Europe it [England] is seriously concerned only with two powers, France and Germany. . . . The events and problems of maimed Hungary are of no interest to English public opinion or to English politics.¹⁰

¹⁰ Sándor Körmeny-Ékes, "Az angol közvélemény," *Magyar Szemle* 7, no. 3 (November 1929): 273–74.

Despite this, the author argued that Hungary had to continue promoting its cultural supremacy, not through propaganda but through scientifically sound historical, geographical, and political publications in foreign languages.¹¹ Efforts continued, but to no avail. For example, under the Darányi government (1936–1938), Hungary attempted to renew ties with other Western powers, especially Great Britain, in order to free itself from Germany's economic and political influence. After the *Anschluss*, the new government, led by Béla Imrédy, established ever-closer ties with Berlin but simultaneously continued attempts to gain British economic and political support. The British attitude once again was nonchalant, as best illustrated by the remarks made on May 29, 1938, by Sir Orme Sargent of the British Foreign Office:

I am sure there are lots of unhappy Hungarians who would like Great Britain to protect them from being “absorbed” by Germany, and who hope that this may be effected by Great Britain's economic intervention. But all our past experience, and all our present evidence, goes to show that Hungary cannot be rendered independent of Germany by any economic action that we can take. . . . There are other countries where British interests are definitely more important and where moreover we have got the means of reinforcing our position, such as Greece in the first place and possibly also Roumania. *Don't therefore let us be tempted to waste our energy or our money in trying to salvage countries like Hungary, where the game is already up.*¹²

In the wake of the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting in Bad Godesberg, the Hungarian question was once again revisited. As Andras Becker's recent study illustrates, there were competing voices within the British Foreign Office and the Cabinet circles—with the latter expressing a degree of interest in Hungarian-Czechoslovak border adjustment—and this provided some reason for Hungarians to be cau-

¹¹ Ibid., 277.

¹² Quoted in Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919–1945*, 138. The emphasis is mine.

tiously optimistic about British support.¹³ However, their optimism was unfounded, for Great Britain wanted to “avoid arguments with Germany,” and the British discussions, as Becker puts it, “turned out to be ‘much ado about nothing’ because at Munich the British remained completely silent over the Magyar question.”¹⁴ Practitioners of interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy, like their Czechoslovak counterparts, failed to realize that such efforts could not prevail in an era of international relations dominated by Great Power interests, weakened by worldwide economic problems, and stained by the largely discredited League of Nations. International relations were largely motivated by national self-interest. For nations—small or great—there were very little, if any, altruistic considerations for intervention. It is true that Italy and Germany offered support, but they did it only insofar as their own interests allowed. In the end, more than anything, Hungarian cultural diplomacy failed because its goal of treaty revision interested no one but Hungarians.

Evaluating Hungarian cultural diplomacy and its efforts to change the country’s foreign perception is complicated. Polish historian Adam Kozuchowski argues that “time has been generous to Austria-Hungary.”¹⁵ He is certainly right that the literary fiction of Robert Musil, Stefan Zweig, Hermann Broch, and Joseph Roth helped shape the image of a benevolent Austrian monarchy.¹⁶ The Hungarian half of the monarchy never produced such a universally acclaimed image. Was it perhaps because of the esoteric nature of the language? Perhaps

¹³ Andras Becker, “The Dynamics of British Official Policy towards Hungarian Revisionism, 1938–39,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 4 (2015): 668–69. For a surprisingly positive reading of British attitudes toward Hungarian revisionist goals, see Barcza’s letter to Kánya in László Zsigmond, ed., *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965), 363, 365, 391, 398, 398a, 451, 451a, 452, 459. For more, see András Bán, *Hungarian-British Diplomacy, 1938–1941* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2004); and Géza Jeszenszky, *Az elveszett presztizs* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986).

¹⁴ Becker, “The Dynamics of British Official Policy towards Hungarian Revisionism, 1938–39,” 672.

¹⁵ Adam Kozuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: The Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Interwar Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

because Hungarians themselves did not appreciate the monarchy? Or perhaps because Hungary was on the “wrong” side of the imaginary East-West divide, and no amount of cultural production could change that? This is hard to assess, especially because there were no public opinion polls. Teleki’s obituary in the *Washington Post* indicates that old stereotypes die hard. Despite all efforts, Hungary continued to be seen as an Oriental country that had just lost its Oriental prime minister in an Oriental fashion:

There is something Oriental about the suicide of the Hungarian Premier, Count Teleki, that might almost be interpreted as a form of racial atavism. The Magyars have for many centuries been thoroughly assimilated into the west European culture, but they were, as the very name of their nation still imply, of relatively recent Mongolian origin. Though we do not know the full circumstances surrounding his death, it is obvious that Count Teleki killed himself not for personal but for political reasons—for the highest reasons of state. In other words, it was an official action in his official capacity. It has already been interpreted as a deliberate admission to the Hungarian people that his policy of gradual appeasement, skillful and honest as it was, is responsible for the present unhappy conditions of his country. It can also be interpreted as an official diplomatic notification to the Germans that he considered that Hungarian participation in the presumably impending attack on the Yugoslav nation, with whom his government so recently entered a treaty of perpetual friendship, would be an act of national dishonor.

By no Western standards, even the strict, chivalric standard of the Hungarian nobleman, can Teleki’s honor be called into question. He had been guided throughout by the most unselfish motives, and it is known that his concept of what would best preserve the peace and independence of his country often ran strongly counter to his personal sympathies concerning the war. His errors, however serious, were committed in the purest of good faith. He had done his best to avert the catastrophe, and more than their best it is said even angels cannot do. His final gesture was much like that of the Oriental who believes that faith can be lost

through fate as well as forfeited by an act of will. It was Oriental, too, in this suggestion that national honor can be restored by an act of individual sacrifice. It recalls those mandarins of the Celestial Kingdom who strangled themselves on a hint of the Emperor's displeasure, the Japanese general who slew himself because of a minor tactical mistake, and the Tokyo policeman who atoned with his blood for having inadvertently made the Son of Heaven 20 minutes late for an official function.¹⁷

Was the entire cultural-diplomatic effort then for naught? If one considers the long-term impacts of Hungarian cultural diplomacy, the picture is less bleak. Interwar cultural diplomacy helped to legitimize Hungary's status as an independent state. After World War II, the international community did not question the country's right to exist. On the other hand, after the 1947 Paris Treaty, revisionism was no longer a possibility.¹⁸ Under the regime of Mátyás Rákosi, Hungary's very own "little Stalin," cultural relations and cultural-diplomatic activities were limited to the Soviet Union. Anikó Macher suggests that only between 1953 and 1955, during the brief premiership of Imre Nagy, was Hungary able to secure partial autonomy to conduct its own cultural relations. Cultural exchange programs began with France at the state level and Great Britain at the non-governmental level. The 1956 Revolution disrupted these developments. In 1959 the political situation normalized enough to speak of official cultural diplomacy, which, like the interwar years, involved publishing, musical events, and other cultural exchanges. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of improving relations with the West, especially NATO countries.¹⁹ Once again, cultural diplomacy was seen as an accepted, perhaps even preferred, tool for diplomats to

¹⁷ "Count Teleki," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1941, 8.

¹⁸ On cultural-diplomatic activities of this period, see József N. Szabó, *Hungarian Culture—Universal Culture: Cultural Diplomatic Endeavours of Hungary, 1945–1948* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999).

¹⁹ Anikó Macher, "Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy, 1957–1963: Echoes of Western Cultural Activity in a Communist Country," in *Searching for Cultural Diplomacy*, ed. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 75–88.

convince the West about liberalization under the new regime of János Kádár. Indeed, Kádár's Hungary enjoyed a degree of freedom in cultural policy, which, in the absence of freedom to conduct an independent foreign policy, was especially important. On the other hand, as Macher points out, the Hungarian Communist Party was increasingly anxious about the possible influence of a growing Western cultural presence, especially French and British, and thus made cultural policy a priority.²⁰ With the United Nations' December 1962 decision to take the Hungarian Question off its agenda, these fears subsided. By 1963 Western countries once again had diplomatic representation in Budapest, and cultural-diplomatic activities served to cultivate relations with the West.²¹ A decade later, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, in cooperation with the Institute for Cultural Relations (Kulturális Kapcsolatok Intézete), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture, sought to utilize the "relative independence" granted to conduct scientific and cultural affairs, for Communists too understood that "cultural politics" was a natural evolution of diplomacy.²²

Cultural capital built up during the interwar years helped Hungarians retain a degree of independence. The infrastructure created for interwar cultural diplomacy remained essential during the communist era. The *New Hungarian Quarterly* was relaunched in 1960 and re-established itself as one of the very few English-language academic journals that offered an overview of the country.²³ Cultural institutions—although more politicized—continued to serve as avenues to the foreign public.²⁴ The tourist industry similarly benefited from interwar achievements and allowed Hungary to have a very lively tourism sector after its borders reopened. The Lakihegy radio transmitter served Hungary and Hungarians abroad until 1977. The Hunnia Film Studio was nationalized as well and remained the backbone of the Hungarian

²⁰ Ibid., 89.

²¹ Ibid., 90–95.

²² MOL, 288 f. 36 /1975/16 ö.e. (October 28, 1975).

²³ In 1993 the journal reclaimed its original name, the *Hungarian Quarterly*.

²⁴ Ujváry, *A harmincharmadik nemzedék*, 162–65.

film industry for many years. However, perhaps the most important long-term achievements of interwar cultural diplomacy were its unintended consequences. These state projects were, in some sense, built and sponsored as “weapons” of Hungarian revisionist offensives, but in reality, through this modernization, they altered the cultural and intellectual landscape of Hungary and moved it forward to the twentieth century. Finally, in some ways these achievements helped Hungarians retain a sense of belonging to Europe despite being part of the Soviet bloc.

After 1989, Hungary, and its neighbors, again faced the challenge of proving their Europeanness. For over four decades, Hungary was sidelined from Europe’s postwar development, which sought to redefine Europeanness, even more than before, by transforming a geographical designation into a category that assumed a degree of common culture and shared experiences. To make the country desirable for investors and visitors alike and to secure Hungary’s integration into NATO and the European Union, the government initiated its *országimázs* (country image) campaign. “Moving toward Europe,” “returning to Europe,” and similar slogans accompanied this campaign. Many of the interwar themes and tropes reappeared. Klebelsberg’s dream was realized, as the Balassi Institute, progeny of the Collegium Hungaricum, maintains Hungarian cultural centers in nineteen locations worldwide.²⁵ According to the institute’s mission statement, it conveys Hungarian achievements to the community of nations, builds a “conscious and value-oriented” national image, maintains and promotes the riches of Hungarian culture both at home and beyond, preserves and cultivates relations with Hungarians abroad, and supports and organizes academic research and Hungarian educational and cultural activities abroad.²⁶

Furthermore, tourism thrives, and some tourist promotional materials include concepts and slogans created or made popular during the

²⁵ Berlin, Stuttgart, Bratislava, Brussels, Bucharest, and Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy in Hungarian, also in Romania), as well as Cairo, Helsinki, London, Moscow, Paris, Prague, Rome, Sofia, Tallinn, New Delhi, New York, Vienna, and Warsaw.

²⁶ “Mission Statement,” http://www.balassiintezet.hu/attachments/article/217/Balassi_%20Intezet_alapito_okirat_2013.pdf (accessed July 28, 2015).

interwar period, including the “most beautiful women on Earth.”²⁷ The late Tony Curtis’s somewhat sexist ad promoted Hungary with the slogan of his most successful movie, *Some Like It Hot*.²⁸ Another ad promoting Lake Balaton offered the promise of a promiscuous one-night stand.²⁹ The tourism industry accounts for 10 percent of the country’s GDP and employs nearly half a million people.³⁰ The government, led by the Foreign Ministry, launched a campaign to distinguish products that it deems “all that is inimitable, unique, distinct—and Hungarian.” The branding of liquors, wines, sausages, porcelains, and the like as “Hungaricum” is more than a clever advertising campaign.³¹ It illustrates and promotes the supposed uniqueness of the country that produced them.

Yet Hungary’s, and the region’s, European reintegration is not without difficulties. In 2003, Hungary signed the “Letter of Eight” in support of the U.S.-led military action against Iraq. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his French counterpart, Jacques Derrida, co-authored an open letter in which the two intellectuals articulated a fresh division between “old Europe,” “core Europe,” and the East-Central European newcomers, which they called “new Europe.”³² Hungarian novelist Péter Esterházy offered an assessment of the situation in his unmistakable style:

²⁷ See “Hungary—World of Potentials 2011,” YouTube video, 7 min., 29 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IiLOdo1qU> (accessed July 24, 2014).

²⁸ “Tony Curtis about Hungary,” YouTube video, 30 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6O_zre2iT94 (accessed July 24, 2014).

²⁹ Magyar Turizmus Zrt., “Balatoni nyár,” YouTube video, 1 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb5x327jx6E> (accessed July 24, 2014).

³⁰ Hajnalka Cseke, “Hungary: Tourism Is Booming and Has Ambitious Plans,” *Budapest Telegraph*, November 3, 2014, http://www.budapesttelegraph.com/news/791/hungary:_tourism_is_booming_and_has_ambitious_plans (accessed July 28, 2015).

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary, “Fact Sheets on Hungary,” http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/NR/rdonlyres/56997B6D-A939-4ED6-91A7-5075718B6B61/0/Hungaricum_en.pdf (accessed July 28, 2015).

³² The “Habermas-Derrida Manifesto” (and reactions to it) is published in an essay collection: see Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations after the Iraq War* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 3–12.

Once I was Eastern European; then I was promoted to the rank of Central European. Those were great times . . . there were Central European dreams, visions, and images of the future . . . Then a few months ago, I became a New European. But before I had the chance to get used to this status—even before I could have refused it—I have now become a non-core European . . . And while I see no serious reason for not translating this new division (core/non-core) with the terms “first-class” and “second-class,” still, I’d rather not speak in that habitual Eastern European, forever insulted way.³³

Should Hungarians feel insulted? Should they be bothered by travel guides describing the country as a place that “has always marched to a different drummer—speaking a language, preparing dishes and drinking wines like no others”?³⁴ Is Hungary really “Europe at its most exotic”?³⁵ Should Hungary be defined by its supposed “fiery national pride” rooted in the “exotic, and undeniably romantic, founding myth of the nomadic, warrior Magyars from the Central Asian steppe”?³⁶ Is it wrong to depict the country as one “sitting at the crossroads of Europe, [where] quirky Hungary has managed to become cosmopolitan while remaining perfectly Hungarian”?³⁷ Or should they accept Esterházy’s advice? “We [Hungarians] are not great, we are small. This is not self-disparagement, it is not even self-criticism, it is just what it is. We are a small, fantastic, and insignificant country. Understanding and processing this is in our vital interest. A [well] understood smallness

³³ Péter Esterházy, “How Big Is the European Dwarf?” trans. Judith Sollosy, in Levy, Pensky, and Torpey, *Old Europe*, 74–75. Also quoted in Holly Case, “Being European: East and West,” in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 112–13.

³⁴ *Lonely Planet: Introducing Hungary*, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/hungary> (accessed July 24, 2015).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Rough Guides to Hungary*, <http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/hungary/> (accessed July 24, 2015).

³⁷ *Rick Steves’ Europe: Hungary*, <https://www.ricksteves.com/europe/hungary> (accessed July 24, 2015).

could be the source of many good things, from our dignity to foreign policy gestures.”³⁸

Are there lessons to learn from interwar Hungarian cultural diplomacy? There are a number of them. Cultural diplomacy requires self-assessment and self-understanding. Forging a coherent image forced interwar Hungarian practitioners to negotiate challenges posed by state creation and modernity. Despite the political leadership’s conservative Christian nationalist stance, cultural diplomacy also embraced and promoted Hungary as modern and progressive. In the process, even if unintentionally, they created the basic template of Hungarian identity, which, for better or worse, survives today.

Cultural diplomacy also requires sensible foreign policy. Hungary’s efforts to revise the treaty limited the success of its cultural-diplomatic efforts. For small countries, like interwar Hungary, cultural diplomacy is one of the tools they can use to gather support to accomplish certain foreign policy goals. However, no amount of quality products, journals, tourist sites, or films can substitute for a foreign policy informed by the realities of international relations in which it is ultimately power that matters.

Cultural diplomacy also requires an interested and open-minded audience. The Hungarian campaign sought to alter the country’s image abroad and hoped that such action would alter the country’s status and ultimately its post-World War I borders. It was all a bit like screaming into the void. Here, without trying to absolve the Hungarian leadership of its mistakes, one must consider the responsibility of the Great Powers. Those nations with ample military, economic, and political power must recognize that the lack of such power creates dependencies that can be taken advantage of by a willing and menacing enough power.

I agree with Esterházy that there is nothing wrong with accepting the reality of being a small nation. But this is only half the story, for the world looks rather different from the vantage point of a small nation. In the absence of real power, conducting a cultural-diplomatic campaign is often the only available tool. In the case of interwar Hungary, consid-

³⁸ Péter Esterházy, *Egy kékharsnya följegyzéseiből* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1994), 244.

ering its short-term goals, it might have been a poor substitute for real power, but what other option existed? Being a small country does not mean giving up the ability to influence outcomes. Perhaps the answer is to find goals that can be shared with others, to create moral authority by conducting a sensible domestic and foreign policy, and to utilize cultural diplomacy to promote such goals and undertakings. On the other hand, such an enterprise should not be limited to “small countries” either.

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Figure 1. *Hungaria Magazin* (July 1937).
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Figure 4. *Hungaria Magazin* (November 1939).
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Figure 5. *Hungaria Magazin* (May 1938).
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Figure 6. *Hungaria Magazin* (August 1938).
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